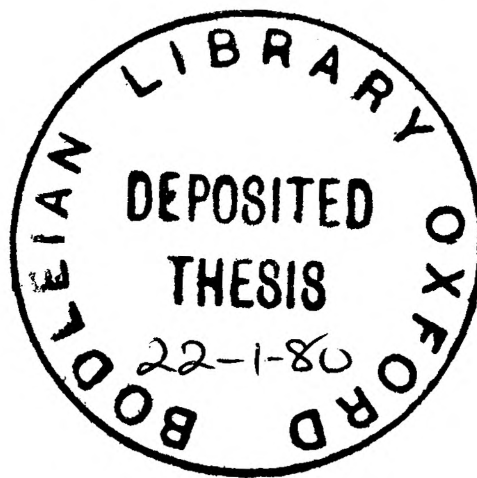
Hindu Pilgrimage

With particular reference to West Bengal, India

By

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ABSTRACT

Journeying to sacred places is an ancient yet contemporarily popular tradition in the Hindu society of India. At the outset of this thesis, the philosophical foundations and general patterns of pilgrimage practice in West Bengal, India, where fieldwork was conducted, are discussed. Case studies of three West Bengali pilgrimage centres -- Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith, which are Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Śākta sacred places, respectively -- reveal the considerable diversity in the regional pilgrimage tradition. In analysing each of these centres, ethnographic data on the social and economic organisation of specialised religious places, roles of sacred specialists, beliefs regarding the deities, patterns of ritual, and social characteristics and behaviour of pilgrims are presented. The literature on pilgrimage is reviewed in search of theoretical tools for the task of generalising about pilgrimage, inclusive of the evident diversity. Analysis and criticism of existing theories indicates that analysts have focused on limited aspects of pilgrimage practice which conform to disciplinary boundaries rather than seeking the patterned consistencies which define the full institution. Comparison of the three case studies reveals that the variation in religious patterns in the centres relates to wider traditions of religious culture in Bengal: the several strands of pilgrimage tradition generally replicate the sub-traditions of Bengali Hinduism and patterns of belief and practice in any sacred place are closely associated with the religious tradition of the regional cult which dominates that centre. It is possible, however, to identify two levels at which the diversity of the pilgrimage institution is founded in systematic conceptual unity. Both levels concern the meaning of pilgrimage within prevalent patterns of Bengali Hinduism. The explicit meaning of pilgrimage in the conscious thought of participants emphasises the journey to the deity's terrestrial abode in search of interaction with the divine. Implicit within

this patterned behaviour are important Hindu metaphysical concepts -- the implicit ideology of pilgrimage -- which invest pilgrimage with meaning derived from abstract Hindu religious thought.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

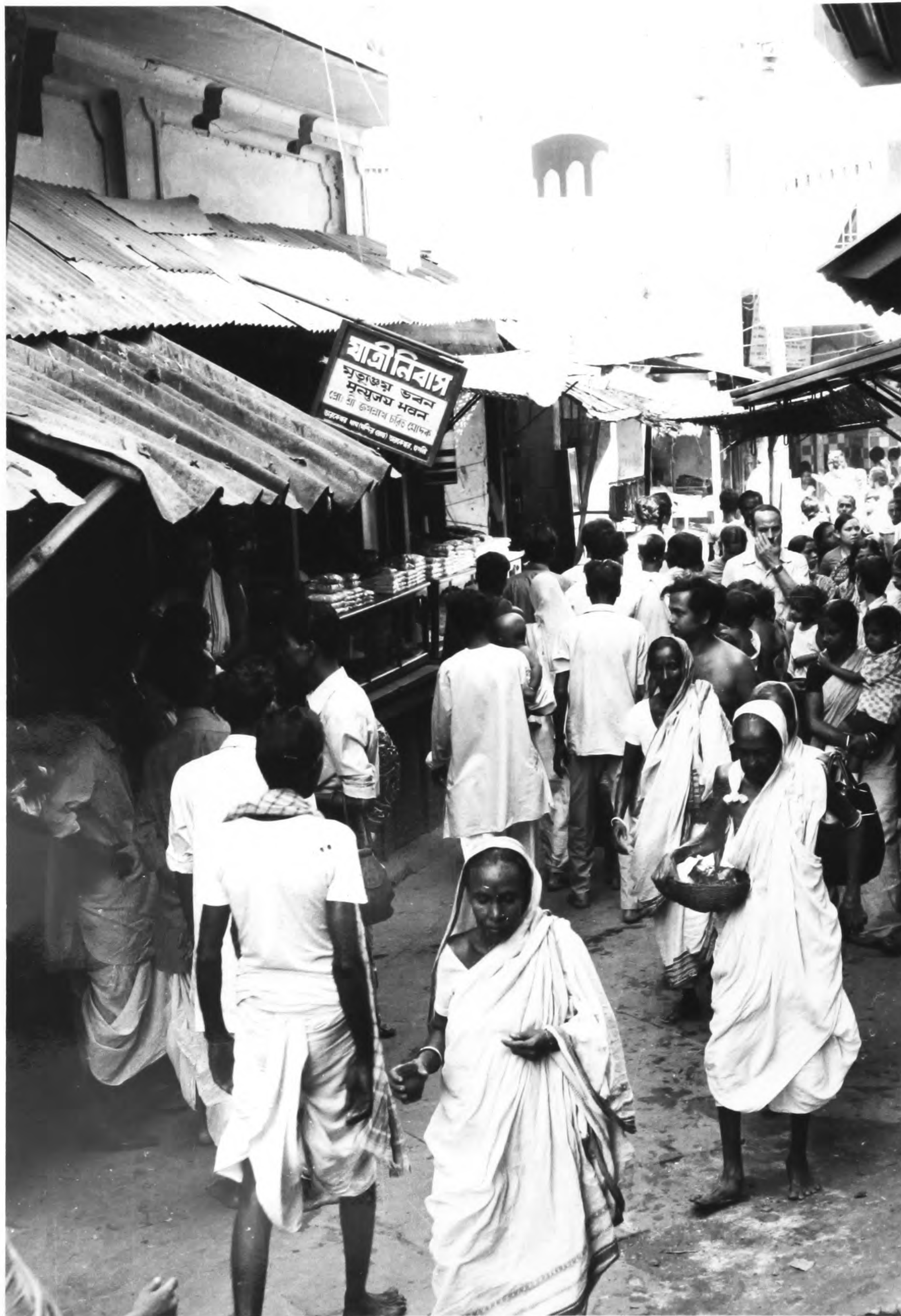
Map

Figure

Chart

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Words which I have chosen to transliterate rather than translate are those that would suffer loss of meaning when put into English. Nearly all non-English words used in this study are from the Bengali. In most cases, I have used the Sanskrit spelling of the word rather than the Bengali. The reason for this is that the words and terms in Bengali concerning religion and philosophy are almost exclusively derived from Sanskrit. Since most readers will be more familiar with the more common Sanskrit terminology, I have not subjected them to Boishnob instead of Vaiṣṇava, or *shoshan* in place of *śmaśāna*. Furthermore, inconsistencies between Bengali orthography and pronunciation make the choice of how to spell Bengali words uncertain. The name of one place in this study is Navadvip. Rendered as pronounced in Bengali it is spelled Nabaddip, and as spelled in Bengali Nabadbip (since 'v' in Sanskrit is given the value 'b' in Bengali). For consistency, I have used the conventional Sanskrit transliterations. In a very few cases, however, Bengali pronunciations have been retained. This has been done where the particularly Bengali nature of the signified would be distorted by Sanskritizing its label. The pilgrims at the heart of this study are unalterably *jātris* to me, rather than the Sanskrit *yātri*. In Sanskrit spellings, I have generally followed Monier-Williams, except for the replacement of his *sh* by *ṣ*, as is more common. I have kept the silent *a* at the end of words except where more conventional usage has dictated that it be dropped. For fluidity of reading, Sanskrit terms have been pluralised by the addition of *s* as in English. Proper names are rendered in their Anglicised versions where these would be more familiar.



Tarakeswar: Pilgrims

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is intended as a contribution to the study of the institutions of Hinduism and to the methodology of social anthropological generalisation. It is an empirical study, but the factual data mustered for the argument are presented not simply as ethnography but rather as the raw material for analysis. While focusing on India, and more particularly on West Bengal, my intention is to pursue a method of investigation of social institutions that is not restricted by region or culture. I will explore one institution as practised in one religious culture, to arrive at a way of looking at this institution which illuminates its essential characteristics and its place in its own religious tradition. I also seek to test a variety of theoretical propositions in searching for the most valid perspective for the analysis of the particular institution.

This research seeks to contribute to the ethnography of West Bengal, but also to current theoretical concerns in anthropology. The theoretical explorations of the thesis are aimed towards creating an understanding of the relationship between one institution and its encompassing socio-cultural universe. The nature of the relationship of actual practices to general patterns, or of discrete instances of actualisation to abstract forms is a topic that has dominated anthropology in recent years. Structural anthropology and, more recently, post-structural theories focusing

directly on this topic (e.g., Edwin Ardener's propositions on paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures (1978)), have attempted to come to grips with this problem. Pilgrimage is an institution showing great internal diversity and yet all the diverse instances of practice share membership in the single category of pilgrimage. The nature of this category, and the relationship of this unity to the varied instances of actual practice, will be a thematic concern throughout the thesis.

The argument of the thesis proceeds from the general to the specific and returns to the general. It begins with a discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of the Bengali Hindu religious tradition and the institutional forms that this tradition takes. These are the foundations of religion, including pilgrimage, in West Bengal. The various strands of the regional pilgrimage tradition are then described. This is followed by ethnographic data on three case studies, and a comparison of these three. A discussion of the sociology of pilgrimage and some concluding theoretical propositions occupy the last section of the thesis. The description and comparison of examples within the West Bengali pilgrimage tradition provides the basis for suggesting the most acceptable analytical perspective for application to pilgrimage. Establishing this theoretical conclusion will allow for the examination of non-Hindu pilgrimage traditions. While this thesis will stop short of actually carrying out this comparison, some suggestions of potentially fruitful directions for future research are included in Chapter IX.

Certain topics of academic debate which will be touched upon in this thesis cannot be given the extended treatment they deserve. There is neither space nor scope in this present work to develop some

suggestive ideas thrown up in the material. Theologians might wish to pursue the analysis of the notions of holiness, sacredness and religion as these relate to and are illuminated by pilgrimage. Philologists might prefer to see more exploration of the terms used in the classical Hindu texts to describe the earthly and the symbolic pilgrimages. Indologists would undoubtedly find room for greater depth in my treatment of the doctrines concerning pilgrimage to be found in the classical texts. Anthropologists may see the potential for fruitful research on the process of Sanskritization, in which pilgrimage traditions and practices may play an important part. A cultural historian would be interested in pursuing the question of whether certain types of societies (e.g., 'feudal') are suitable for pilgrimage while others (e.g., hunting-gathering) are not. It has been necessary to leave these questions unresolved in order to remain on the central path, lest this study itself peregrinate.

a. Pilgrimage: significance and definitions

It is estimated that more than ten million people gathered at sacred Prayāga in Allahābād, India, in January, 1977, for a bath at the auspicious Kumbha-melā. In September, 1978, despite the efforts of the Institute for Scientific Atheism and the Knowledge Society, pilgrims continued to flow to the small house in a village in the U.S.S.R. where a stain on the wall resembling a recently deceased family member had appeared. The hājj (pilgrimage) to Mecca in 1977 brought together 1.6 million Muslims from all corners of the world for a ritual that has been occurring annually for over 13 centuries. The number of foreign pilgrims to Mecca in 1977 had increased seven-fold over the numbers recorded in 1950.[1]

[1] Mohammad Abdul-Rauf, "Pilgrimage to Mecca", National Geographic, Vol.154, No.4, Nov. 1978, pp.581-607.

Throughout the millennia, in various modes and in numerous countries, individuals have set out from home, crossing large and frequently dangerous stretches of territory, in search of the sanctified abodes of God. Their pilgrimages have taken them to sea in untrustworthy vessels, to the depths of remote caves, to the peaks of distant mountains, to the desert, to the spring, to death by suicide, to the centre of imperial cities and to war with the infidel. What man has done so commonly in so many different contexts is obviously of great interest to the student of his society and culture. One would also expect that the large amounts of money involved in pilgrimage, in terms of the collective expenditures made by pilgrims and the income derived directly and indirectly from pilgrimage practices, would create interest in the institution and its future, even if only as a form of tourism. It is therefore surprising to find that the literature on pilgrimages, especially of an analytical kind, is sparse. Only a handful of studies have been devoted to research on particular pilgrimage traditions in the various religions in which such traditions exist, and only a handful of paragraphs have considered the practice of pilgrimage from a comparative perspective. Given the widespread incidence of pilgrimage practice throughout the world and across the ages, the dearth of critical studies of the institution is surprising and needs correction.

The word pilgrimage refers to travelling on a journey, specifically journeys (usually of a long distance) to some sacred place. There are also symbolic and extended uses for the term. Symbolically, the pilgrimage refers to the course of mortal life depicted as a journey. In its extended sense, any journey, especially with a destination in mind, is a pilgrimage. I use the term pilgrimage in its most conventional and also in an unconventional sense. The pilgrimages to be studied will be restricted to those of a religious nature. This is not to say that other

uses of the term (e.g., a pilgrimage to Lenin's Tomb, a pilgrimage to Whitehall) are incorrect or derivative, but that the type of pilgrimage being considered here, and designated by the more general label pilgrimage, is the religious journey only. 'Pilgrimage' will be used unconventionally as a noun designating the full composite of all features involved in the structured institutional complex centred on a single religious centre. It thus labels the full set of symbols, history, rituals, legends, behaviour, deities, places, specialists, etc., attached to a particular journey and shrine. The pilgrimage to any pilgrimage centre, in this sense, refers not simply to the journey to that place, but to the complete set of socio-cultural features involved in that pilgrimage institution as an historical entity. Thus one can speak of the pilgrimage to Lourdes, the pilgrimage to Mecca, the pilgrimage to Benares, and so on, meaning the structured, many-faceted institutional complex centred on those sites. This usage conveys something of the observable sociological inclusiveness of every pilgrimage institution, for which there is no conventional English word.

One further concept requiring clarification at the outset is the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The journey of the pilgrim involves transference from the mundane common realm of everyday life to the sacrality of the holy place. The latter place is therefore conceived and depicted in the religious ideology as a place set apart from the profane. The term sacred, as I use it, refers to the category of things, places, persons, qualities, etc., which the religious tradition itself designates as possessing a consecrated nature, due to their acknowledged association with some aspect of divinity. It is in its designation as such that a thing becomes sacred. By sacred realm, I refer to the supra-phenomenal location where the deities are believed

to reside (i.e., the devaloka of Hinduism). The profane is the counterpart of the sacred. It is not set apart but is accessible. It is not consecrated by a special relationship to the divine. It is earthly, perceptible, tangible and phenomenal. It is the stuff of the everyday world of man. I recognise that the terms sacred and profane have been criticised because the ostensible opposition they imply does not encompass certain qualities which are neither profane nor sacred. In an article on Durkheim's original theory of the sacred and the profane, Stanner (1967:230) suggests a third category -- the mundane -- but then goes on to say that even with the addition of a third category, there are difficulties in categorising certain types of things within the system. In his theory, Durkheim has given an absolutist cast to relations which are, in fact, relative to different situational contexts. Stanner presents the criticism of Durkheim's theory that his were "strained, static categories" (p.234). I do not use the concepts of sacred and profane as an all-inclusive dichotomy, but rather as descriptive of two characterisations of relations to the divine. I do not intend to imply a pure/impure or a good/bad dichotomy, as Das (1977:128-29) convincingly argues cannot be maintained. I am most directly concerned with sacred space. In the context of pilgrimage, a distinction between territory made distinguishable by a positive relationship with a deity and other space is tenable, especially since the sacred space is considered to be the actual abode of the deity. In this usage one finds little of the ambiguity that has been shown to exist if one takes the "sacred" and "profane" to be an inclusive, empirical, binary system for sorting all of reality. Bengalis themselves use the word pabitra (Sanskrit: pavitra) to designate the sacred, as in pabitra-sthāna (holy place), a term frequently used to describe places of pilgrimage.

b. Fieldwork

(i) West Bengal

The Indian state of West Bengal is a political unit corresponding more or less exactly to the part of eastern India in which the Bengali language is spoken. The actual distribution of this language spans the border with Bangladesh, however. The geographical area of West Bengal is part of the alluvial plain of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers, and is separated from Bangladesh for reasons of politics and religion (Bangladesh being Muslim, West Bengal Hindu) rather than geography or culture.[1]

The majority community of West Bengal is Hindu. There is a large Muslim minority, and also smaller groups of Christians and tribals. The population at the most recent census (1971) was 44.4 millions. It is 24% urban, but when the urban area of Calcutta is omitted, the urban proportion of the population decreases to 7%. The culture of the Hindu majority is quite homogeneous.

West Bengal was chosen as the location for the field study for two reasons. One is that the area was quite well known to me because of having spent nearly one year there doing field work for the World Health Organization Smallpox Eradication Programme. During this time I became familiar with the language, culture and geography of West Bengal and developed the idea of doing research on the intriguing places of pilgrimage to which my smallpox work took me. After completing my tenure with W.H.O., I began the collection of data on pilgrimage in that area I knew best. Secondly, West Bengal offered a good opportunity to study

[1]The physical and human geography of West Bengal is treated in A.B. Chatterjee (et al) (eds.), West Bengal, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1970.

more than one sub-tradition of Hindu pilgrimage practice. Bengali Hinduism is arguably typical of wider Hindu patterns and yet contains several different branches of religious sub-tradition within its religious mainstream, notably the Śiva-Śākta and Vaiṣṇava. A study of Bengal afforded sufficient diversity to allow for comparison, and also sufficient homegeneity to limit the methodological problems of data-collection.

(ii) The Three Sites

Three sites of pilgrimage in West Bengal were selected for study because each was, in a significant way, different from the others yet all were quite orthodox sacred centres. The principal distinction between the sites is the shrine deity: the deity of Tarakeswar is Śiva, of Navadvip Viṣṇu, and of Tarapith Śakti (Devī). The cult of Hinduism associated with each site varies in relation to the deity. Since comparison is one goal of the study, diversity in the sample was deliberately chosen.

None of the sites had been studied by a social anthropologist. No scholar of any kind had written on Tarapith. Theologians and historians, especially of religion, had taken an interest in the events which took place in Navadvip, although not in the place itself. A local sociologist has published three journal articles on Tarakeswar, but these barely scratch the surface in documenting the religious complex centred on that town.[1]

(iii) Orientation and Methodology of Fieldwork and Reporting

Fieldwork was conducted over two periods (January-April, 1976; October, 1977 - May, 1978).[2] During these visits to West Bengal, I moved

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[1] Chakrabarti (1973; 1976a; 1976b).

[2] Financial support for the first period of field work was received from the Trustees of the Rhodes Trust, Oxford, who permitted me to take the third year of my Rhodes Scholarship in India. The subsequent tour was made possible by a doctoral fellowship from the Canada Council.

between the three places of pilgrimage, following the festival calendar of each. Work in each place consisted of documenting the physical arrangement of the place of pilgrimage and its social organisational features, as well as interviewing ritual specialists and pilgrims. In gathering information from the ritual specialists in each of the sacred places, it was found effective to conduct long undirected discussions, in the course of which they eventually came to explain all the features of the religious complex I was investigating. Pilgrims, in contrast, were prepared to spend only a few minutes (if any) of their time answering questions. With this in mind, an interviewing schedule was prepared on which was printed the several important factual questions asked of each pilgrim. In all, approximately 1500 pilgrims were questioned verbally following this schedule. A copy of the interviewing form is reproduced in Appendix A.

Pilgrims are the most numerous actors in the pilgrimage institution, yet seldom have pilgrims themselves been studied, and even less frequently in any depth. Chaubey (1958), Karve (1962), Saraswati (1965) and Binford (1976) give descriptive portraits of pilgrims on particular pilgrimages in India, but mention only in passing the social characteristics of the pilgrims. Bose et al (1958), Vidarthi (1961), Havell (1968), Sopher (1968), Jha (1971), Mishra (1971), Clothey (1972), Freeman (1977) and others in their works on Hindu places of pilgrimage, focus attention on pilgrims hardly at all. Yet without pilgrims, there is no pilgrimage.

Interviewing of pilgrims was conducted by myself and my research assistant, Mr. Ashok Chakraverty. Generally one pilgrim per pilgrim-party was interviewed. No difficulties were encountered in eliciting information on any of the questions except two. When pilgrims were asked whether they were on pilgrimage with a vow, they sometimes hesitated to reveal that fact.

Questioning in a more indirect manner (avoiding the Bengali word for vow: manot) usually produced the desired answer. Secondly, the question to which sect or sub-group of Hinduism the interviewee belonged was often not understood by pilgrims. It became clear that the notion of 'membership' was in most cases inappropriate, as pilgrims frequently did not seem to see themselves as belonging to a group, as membership implies. It is more representative of Bengali categories of thought to represent the allegiance of pilgrims to the various cults of Hinduism as a matter of personal religious orientation. In some cases, individuals would clearly and unequivocally identify themselves as cult members, but others, who in their personal religious lives still were oriented towards the worship of one deity rather than another, could be identified by questions regarding initiation (dīkṣā) they had taken, or the identity of the deity they chose to follow (their iṣṭa-devatā).

Another minor problem was the hesitancy of some Bengali women to speak with two male interviewers, one a foreigner. An attempt was made to interview women in proportion to their general numbers in the pilgrim population, and so this problem had to be faced. It was found that approaching women through the male members of their party, to whom the outline of what was to be asked was explained, overcame this difficulty. Help in this regard was also forthcoming from the temple priests, with whom good rapport was established, who encouraged pilgrims to answer our questions.

It would be possible to go into great depth in the analysis of the various characteristics of the pilgrim sample, correlating the various features of the makeup of the pilgrim body to uncover the characteristics of each sub-group of pilgrims. I have chosen not to perform these correlations. While it would be interesting to know, for example, what were the educational levels of pilgrims of Brāhmaṇ caste or from Howrah

District and to perhaps draw inferences from these correlations, this sort of analysis does not address itself to the surveying of the total group characteristics of the pilgrim body, in which I am most interested. The social characteristics of pilgrims are integral to their pilgrim role, and as such are important features of the qualitative characteristics of the pilgrimage institution. My intention in presenting statistical tabulations of pilgrims' social characteristics and pilgrimage activities is simply to develop an overview of who are the pilgrims and what is their pilgrimage. The statistical compilations are intended to be aids to the qualitative description of the pilgrims and will allow for the comparison of the three pilgrim groups.

It should be noted here as well that I have chosen by and large to adopt a synchronic approach to the analysis of pilgrimage. While the study of the development and change of Hindu pilgrimage patterns and traditions over time is an important and neglected area of social research, the absence of historical records and studies makes such a diachronic study impossible to perform on the areas where I did research. What little historical information was available has been incorporated.

c. The Study of Pilgrimage

Various aspects of pilgrimage practice have been investigated by students and scholars from various disciplines. There is little research, however, that considers pilgrimage in its own right as the focus for study. Anthropologists concerned with the social structure of village and community life have paid little attention to the seemingly minor practice that takes four or five people or families out of the local community for a few days annually. Historians have found little of the dramatic stuff of history among the wayfarers who ignore the concerns of kings and popes

to travel with staff and rough garment to remote shrines. Geographers have seen the periodic movements of people as well as the arrangements of systems of shrines, but have not typically addressed themselves to the ideological systems that give rise to these features of human geography.

Thus the anthropologist misses the significance of pilgrimage in establishing connections between local and larger social groups, and the importance to individuals of their pilgrimage performances; the historian fails to note an institution which gives popular form to the needs and desires of individuals and communities as structured by the historical moment; similarly the geographer does not recognise what is specifically religious in the journey to the sacred shrine or holy river. Nevertheless, a body of literature has come to exist in which these various disciplines, along with psychology and theology, have made attempts to answer some questions regarding pilgrimage practice. A critical look at the literature on pilgrimage will reveal what is worthwhile and what still remains to be accomplished in this field of study. It will also identify where this present work fits into the existing body of writings on the topic of pilgrimage.

(i) The Literature

The study of pilgrimage does not fall neatly within the scope of any single academic discipline. History, anthropology, geography, psychology and theology all approach the study of pilgrimage from the perspective of their subject. Although little has been written on pilgrimage, the few available studies have tended to focus on the limited aspects of the institution which did correspond to existing disciplinary boundaries. There have been few attempts to adopt a perspective which allows for

the inclusion of actors, actions and arenas in one analysis, treating the components of pilgrimage as parts of a whole. As a result, even the best work to be found on pilgrimage is limited in scope. It also follows that the conclusions drawn by authors on pilgrimage have tended to reflect the incidental characteristics of their particular studies. Still, it is desirable to draw upon these studies in order to develop further ideas which have been expressed about particular components of the pilgrimage institution, and to review data for comparison to that collected in West Bengal.

The most commonly available literature on pilgrimage is ethnographic studies of particular places of pilgrimage or, more rarely, of pilgrimages. Studies of religion in every Christian country pay attention to the pilgrimages to be found there, from the pilgrimages of the New World (Ste. Anne de Beaupré in Canada, Bom Jesus de Lapa in Brazil, the Virgin of Guadaloupe in Mexico and the Black Christ of Esquipulas in Guatemala) to the many of the Old World (especially Jerusalem, Lourdes in France, Loretto and Rome in Italy, Częstochowa in Poland, Knock in Ireland and many others). There is a considerable amount of information available which is descriptive of these places and of pilgrimage places in non-Christian countries.[1]

Several studies of sacred places proved useful to this research as examples of case studies of particular places of pilgrimage. The classic

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[1]See, for example, John Adair, The Pilgrims' Way: Shrines and Saints in Britain and Ireland, Thames and Hudson, London, 1978; Maire MacNeill, The Festival of Lughasa, Oxford University Press, London, 1962; Ivor Dowse, The Pilgrim Shrines of Scotland, Faith Press, London, 1965; Walter Starkie, The Road to Santiago, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965; and Source Orientales, Les Pélerinages, Paris, 1960; L. Austine Waddell, Tibetan Buddhism, Dover Publications, New York, 1975, pp.305-323; Richard Ponsonby-Fane, Studies in Shintō and Shrines, The Ponsonby Memorial Society, Kyoto,1962.

study by N.K. Bose, et al (1958), on the Liṅgarāj temple in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, gives sound guidance for the task of researching temple organisation. This thorough paper indicates many of the areas of temple life into which one can probe, and thereby makes available a framework for the sorting of the apparent chaos of daily temple affairs into clear and orderly categories. A comparably enlightening study which concentrates particularly on religious specialists in a place of pilgrimage is Baidyanath Saraswati's "Study of Specialists in Traditional Learning: The Pandits of Kashi" (1975). These two papers provided helpful methodological approaches to the place of pilgrimage and its organisation. James Freeman's studies of Kapileswar, a pilgrimage centre in Orissa, were useful for setting the perspective on the temple and its work within the larger context of the economics of the village, in which the temple is a source of employment and income (Freeman 1971, 1974, 1975 and 1977).

Two studies, very different from each other, shed more light on places of pilgrimage. Vidyarthi's seminal research on Gayā (1961) was the first serious attempt by a social scientist to come to grips with the structural arrangement of a place of pilgrimage in India. Like his mentors, Redfield, Singer and Opler, Vidyarthi's work is synchronic and focused upon culture. He adopts Redfield's "great tradition-little tradition" dichotomy, and perceives the interactions taking place in Gayā in terms of the interplay of these two traditions. More specifically, he sees Gayā as a point of diffusion of elements of the great tradition among the populace (representing the little tradition). This theory does considerable disservice to a complex and subtle social and cultural system which derives inspirations and patterns of behaviour from a variety of sources, and which is a matrix of mutually interacting groups and traditions. It is possible to conceptualise what is meant by great and little traditions, but the

actual web of actors, relationships and cultural traditions which exist and are active in the arena of the place of pilgrimage defy such a simplistic dualistic objectification. Vidyarthi's study has value as a synchronic descriptive cultural ethnography. It suffers, however, from Vidyarthi's bonds to the Redfieldian model, to which he adheres even though he himself found difficulties in its application. Vidyarthi persistently encountered difficulty in isolating "the higher form of Hinduism" from its lesser forms (p.111). Even the Purāṇas, which are the foundation of the pilgrimage to Gayā, are found to contain injunctions to behaviour more in keeping with ideas of the little rather than great tradition. This makes the great tradition very difficult to locate indeed. Rather than recognise that these 'two traditions' are not, in fact, separable entities, Vidyarthi attempts to preserve this theory by identifying a process of "combination and compromise" (p.112) between the two. This theoretical adjunct is necessary to bring Vidyarthi's ethnographic data into line with his theory. It allows for the preservation of the notion of two distinguishable traditions while, in fact, giving recognition to the contrary situation that he describes. In reality, Vidyarthi could not identify two substantially different traditions of Hinduism in Gayā.

A second weakness of Vidyarth's study is his almost total neglect of the belief system that serves as a vital link between the place of pilgrimage and its extensive hinterland, geographically and religiously. Vidyarthi's main concern is with the organisation of a specialised sacred city. That it is a place of pilgrimage figures only briefly in his discussion of ritual performances and the relations between priests and pilgrims. Vidyarthi's contribution to theoretical perspectives on pilgrimage is found in his material on the ritual specialists of Gayā. His discussions of the sacred place and the ritual performances are not as

useful. In the former, he has produced a schema which divides the pilgrimage centre into a variety of different types of sub-centres: sacred centre, sacred cluster, sacred segment and sacred zone. Despite its general form, this typology is not universally applicable. It cannot be used, for example, in small pilgrimage centres in which there is only one main temple, and so only one area of pilgrim activity. Vidyarthi's hierarchy of ritual arenas was not developed out of comparison, and so it is not surprising to find that, while very applicable to Gayā, it does not fit well with all other pilgrimage centres. However, despite these failings, Vidyarthi's work broke ground in the study of Hindu pilgrimage, and gave rise to a number of similar studies of other Hindu places of pilgrimage (e.g., Jha 1971; Jindel 1976).[1]

The second study of sacred centres which has contributed to an understanding of pilgrimage places is a chapter entitled "Sacred Places: Temple, Palace, 'Centre of the World'", by Mircea Eliade in his Patterns in Comparative Religion (1963). Eliade draws material from a wide variety of societies to illustrate several consistencies in the structure of holy places. He says that the power or spirit that is the source of the sacredness of the holy place is always believed to be eternally vital and a living presence in that very place. The source is enshrined in a sacred enclave, separated from surrounding profane space. Eliade also notes that the sacred place is never believed to be "'chosen' by man; it is merely discovered by him; in other words, the sacred place in some way or another reveals itself to him" (p.369) by some means taken to indicate the presence

[1]There are also numerous studies of temples; see especially Howard F. Hirt, "The Dravidian Temple Complex: A South Indian Cultural Dominant," Bombay Geographical Magazine, 1961, pp.95-103; Stella Kramrisch, The Hindu Temple, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1946; George Michell, The Hindu Temple, Paul Elek, London, 1977.

or intentions of the supernatural. A third fact suggested by Eliade is that "every consecrated place, in fact, is a 'centre'...where there exists the possibility of breaking through from the level of earth to the level of heaven" (p.373). He identifies the point of intersection of heaven and earth with the sacred mountain that stands at the centre of the world and which is symbolically associated with every holy centre (as an Axis Mundi). Of the journey to the centre, Eliade says "The way is arduous and fraught with peril because it is, in fact, a rite for passing from the profane to the sacred, from the passing and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to god" (p.382).

All of the above is good and useful. Unfortunately, Eliade then attempts to account for man's proclivity for establishing sacred places by suggesting that "a specific condition of man in the cosmos" is his "nostalgia for paradise": "the desire to be always, effortlessly, at the heart of the world, of reality, of the sacred, and, briefly, to transcend, by natural means, the human condition and regain a divine state of affairs..." (p.383). This nostalgia for paradise, he says later, is "a longing for transcendent forms" (p.385). The implication of these ideas is that people visit sacred centres as centres of the world where the human condition is transcended. While the structural features identified by Eliade seem to indicate important aspects of all sacred places, his attempts to root all of these in an instinctive human drive of a particular character denies the wide variety of motives and conceptions which accompany pilgrimage. It cannot be said of the large number of pilgrims who go on pilgrimage for explicitly concrete instrumental reasons that they are so obviously acting out a nostalgia for paradise. It is difficult, indeed, to suggest a first cause for man's remarkable interest in creating and demarcating sacred places, but perhaps the question has no single answer. Certainly recourse to a

postulated inherent universal sentiment does not satisfy.

Sacred centres receive a number of different treatments from different authors. Some analysts have restricted their scope to the establishment of typologies of sites. Agehananda Bharati, (1963), in one of the first modern works bringing together some of the important themes of Hindu pilgrimage, addresses himself to shrines of the goddess (pīṭhas), sites connected with the lives and austerities of charismatic religious individuals, Buddhist pilgrimages, water-associated pilgrimages and dhāmas (sacred abodes). Bharati presents a great deal of information on these types of pilgrimage places, but does not attempt to analyse his data sociologically. Such is not his purpose. He has collected material indicating variety within a religious tradition, and has presented it as data on the history of religions.

In a more recent work, Bharati (1970) has formulated a refined tripartite typological scheme for Hindu pilgrimages. He identifies: (1) All-India, trans-sectarian sites (e.g., Kanchi, Dwarka, Ayodhya, Mathurā, Varanasi, Ujjain and Hardwar), (2) regionally important sites, usually with some sectarian emphasis but not exclusively sectarian (e.g., Arunachala and Dakshineswar), and (3) purely sectarian sites which are related to a type of ritual or particular deity (e.g., Śākta pīṭhas). This formulation is a crystallisation of observation, admits to many exceptions and does not attempt to offer general explanations or analyses for pilgrimage behaviour. It is a descriptive typology.

One of the most important works on Hindu pilgrimage also adopts a typological approach. Bhardwaj's book, Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India (1973) is an attempt by a cultural geographer to find a nationwide pattern among pilgrimage sites in India. His effort is admirable in that he describes a geographical pattern of pilgrimage sites based on

a grand circumambulation of the sub-continent as indicated in the Mahābhārata, and attempts to probe as well into the normative background of contemporary pilgrimage practices. This leads him to create a hierarchy of sacred places, to which he links the caste composition of the pilgrims, the purposes and frequency of pilgrimage and the religious travels of the pilgrims. His data are derived from fieldwork in eleven places of pilgrimage in Himachal Pradesh state in India.

There is much that is good in Bhardwaj's study. He has thoroughly reviewed the ancient texts for information on pilgrimages and by that has cleared some ground in the search for the philosophical roots of the pilgrimage tradition. His survey of the association of sites with site characteristics (river banks, river sources, confluences, etc.) and with chief deities, provides all that is needed on those subjects. He is, as this indicates, a good geographer.

Bhardwaj's schema for the organisation of sacred places is a hierarchy which includes five levels of sacred place: pan-Hindu, supra-regional, regional, subregional and local. He recognises that this system of ranking is not representative of an objective or accepted hierarchy of sites, because his levels "do not represent steps in a single system, and each successively lower level is not necessarily subordinate to the level above it" (p.226). The variety of responses when pilgrims were asked to rank holy places leads Bhardwaj to conclude that "the pilgrims' perceptions of the ranks of holy places reflects the absence of a unified system of ranking within Hinduism itself" (p.226). Bhardwaj nevertheless defends his ranking on the basis that it is useful for analytical purposes.

Bhardwaj's findings can be summarised briefly. As one moves along the continuum from local shrine to pan-Hindu sacred place, one observes

a corresponding increase in certain factors of social status among pilgrims patronising the shrines. Pilgrims to the highest-level sacred places are generally from the ritually higher castes and higher classes and tend to be on pilgrimage more for spiritual (meritorious) than material (instrumental) reasons. At the middle level, Bhardwaj finds personalised deities propitiated for material gain by mixed groups of pilgrims, while at the local level, he finds Scheduled caste pilgrims and Mother-goddess shrines.

The objection to Bhardwaj's work does not lie with his excellent material but with the schematic form that he uses to analyse it. The ranking of sacred places exists solely as the imposition of the analyst, as he himself admits. A Tamil would surely rank sacred places in India very differently from a Kashmiri or Bengali; and then again, a Tamil Vaiṣṇava would present a very different hierarchy from a Tamil Śaiva. The possibilities for variation are so vast as to make the exercise of questionable utility. If specified cultural characteristics are then linked to the various levels of this alleged ranking, the likelihood of encountering numerous anomalies throughout India is high. Bhardwaj's generalisations may hold true for Himachal Prȧdesh but cannot be extended beyond that cultural area. It may even be that the incidence of high caste pilgrimage to high ranking centres and that of low caste pilgrimage to low level centres can be attributed directly to the great coercive power and dominance of higher caste groups if, as Berreman (1972:103) indicates, low caste pilgrims are not allowed to worship at the high caste shrines in Himachal Pradesh. They have recourse to other shrines. These are factors possibly unique to the socio-cultural region of Himachal Pradesh, without necessary bearing elsewhere. Bhardwaj extends his conclusions beyond his own area of study by framing generalisations

and using general terms such as "pan-Hindu" and "regional", yet he does this without reference to data on the other regions of India for which he is generalising. He stumbles over the regional and cultural variation in India, demonstrating so clearly the error in analysing pilgrimage on the level of cultural characteristics rather than underlying structures of behaviour and meaning, which remain constant despite variations between regions or cultures. To give one clear example of this analytical fault, the only site included in Bhardwaj's study as a pan-Hindu shrine and therefore identified with pilgrimage for non-material purposes is Badrinath. The chief deity of Badrinath is Viṣṇu and, as will be discussed at length in later chapters, it is in the nature of the Vaiṣṇava cult to make pilgrimages out of devotion rather than for explicit material ends. Bhardwaj associates pan-Hindu sites with non-material pilgrimage on the basis of one example, the features of which might better be explained in terms of its Vaiṣṇava cultic character rather than its supposed ranking in a hierarchy. Bhardwaj falls prey to the view that institutions founded in the structures of society can be understood by sorting the myriad forms that the underlying pattern takes. He takes one regional form for the pattern.

In a recent work on pilgrimage, Victor Turner and Edith Turner (1978) have also put forward a typology of pilgrimages. The Turners distinguish:

(1) "prototypical pilgrimages": "Those pilgrimages which, on the authority of documentary or widespread traditional evidence, were established by the founder of a historical religion, by his first disciples, or by important national evangelists of his faith" (e.g., Mecca, Jerusalem, Rome, Benares, Mount Kailas and Kandy),

(2) "archaic pilgrimages": "pilgrimages which bear quite evident traces of syncretism with older religious beliefs and symbols" (e.g., Glastonbury,

Chalma in Mexico, Croagh Patrick in Ireland and Pandharpur in India), (3) "medieval pilgrimages": "pilgrimages which originated in the European Middle Ages and take their tone from the theological and philosophical emphases of that epoch" (e.g., Canterbury, Walsingham, Compostela, Loreto, Assisi, Częstochowa, etc.), and (4) "modern pilgrimage": pilgrimages from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "characterized by a highly devotional tone and the fervent personal piety of their adherents" and "deeply involved with mass technological and scientific culture" (pp.17-19).

The Turners assert that the first two categories are to be found in all historical religions and the last two in Christianity only.

It is indisputable that the unique character of a place of pilgrimage emerges as the creation of the local forces of geography, religion, history, economics, politics and demography. It is possible to generalise about the manifest characteristics of pilgrimages, but only insofar as one recognises that much of the form taken by a pilgrimage is the product of larger forces in the society and nation. Jonathan Sumption has titled his book on Medieval Christian pilgrimage Pilgrimage: An image of Mediaeval Religion. Pilgrimage, he says, "affords a unique reflection of mediaeval religion at every stage of its complicated development" (1975:307). This is a point which the Turners (who do not refer to Sumption's comprehensive work) would do well to note. They have established a typology in which the first category is determined by the circumstances of the founding of the pilgrimage, the second by its relationship to pre-existing local usages and religion and the third and fourth by the socio-temporal environment in which they were founded. These are all factors which are part of the historical milieu at the time of the founding of the pilgrimage, and which are thus reflected in its character. There are several difficulties

with this typology. In the first instance, it is not exhaustive. Non-Christian pilgrimages are reduced to two categories, with no allowance, for example, for modern Hindu or Muslim pilgrimages, as do exist. Secondly, the typology is arbitrary in selecting only certain features from the surrounding socio-religious environment to characterise each category. This is a procedure which leads to error, since the defining features of one category are not necessarily excluded from others. It is not inconceivable to think of a saint or cult founder establishing a holy site on a spot sacred to another archaic religion, as in fact, is asserted about Mecca.[1] Thirdly, even in the few examples from India that the Turners suggest, there is room for dispute over their categorisation. The inclusion of Benares and Mount Kailāśa as proto-typical pilgrimages, that is, founded by an individual or his followers, is incorrect. These two places were founded under circumstances presently totally unknown. The second category of the Turners' typology (archaic pilgrimages) again has an Indian example of Pandharpur in the Deccan. This site is included here because its "equivocal deity Vithoba Bhave may well have Dravidian, pre-Indoeuropean associations" (p.18). I am no more certain than the Turners. What is known more certainly, however, is that the chief deity of Benares and Mount Kailāśa -- Śiva -- has proven associations with pre-Indoeuropean deities, as discovered in the excavations of the Indus Valley civilisation. This should place these two pilgrimage centres in the Turners' second category. Given the nature of the division of categories, the anomalies and confusion will be endless. The fourth and most telling criticism of this typology is

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[1] "When Muhammad at last captured the city of Makkah, he destroyed the gods of the Ka'bah but incorporated the shrine itself and the pilgrimage connected with it into Islam" (W.Richard Comstock, Religion and Man, Harper and Row, New York, etc., 1971, p.556).

that it does not assist in making order out of the large number and variety of pilgrimages in the world. Each pilgrimage, as Sumption has correctly noted, reflects the religious times in which it operates. It is a place patronised by people from outside. By a variety of means, including deities, rituals, symbols, myths and beliefs, it is woven into the full culture of the society from which it draws pilgrims. The Turners' typology attempts to sort pilgrimages by the characteristics they reflect from the surrounding religious culture. It holds true so long as the factors of the culture dominant in any two places remain similar. That this typology is thus of limited value in analysing pilgrimages across the boundaries of time and culture is implicitly recognised by the Turners, since two of their categories are reserved for one religion (Christian) at different historical periods (medieval and modern). The typology is not universally applicable, as the Turners would like.

The limited validity and utility of the Turners' typology derive from their attempt to find a structure for categorising pilgrimages in the incidental superstructural cultural attributes that are part of the pilgrimage but are not part of its most fundamental structure. Other attempts at structural analyses of pilgrimage by Victor Turner will be discussed in Chapter VIII.

The typologies of pilgrimage discussed to this point have proven unsatisfactory because they compare cross-culturally on the basis of culture. This is to risk finding oneself comparing artifact to artifact, rather than looking at more fundamental underlying factors which determine behaviour within the variable cultural idiom.

Some authors have avoided the difficulty of cross-cultural comparison of pilgrimage by restricting themselves to the ethnographic study of one

pilgrimage. These studies are different from those of Vidyarthi and subsequent writers because they are studies of pilgrimages as social behaviour rather than of places of pilgrimage as arenas of religious activity. John A. Works' Pilgrims in a Strange Land (1976) is a very thorough study of the pilgrimage patterns of the Muslims of West Africa, particularly the Hausa, and how these patterns have given rise to communities of Hausa along the pilgrimage routes to Mecca. Another study of related practices among the Fulani has been made by J. S. Birks (1977). Both studies concern the obligatory Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca -- the hājj. They will be discussed in the consideration of the obligatory pilgrimage.

Three studies of pilgrimage parties in India are also noteworthy. Ganesh Chaubey's "An Unique Organisation of Shaiva Pilgrims" (1958) is a good ethnographic account of pilgrims to the shrine of Vaidyanātha in Bihar. As in the second paper, by I. Karve (1962), the subject of the study is the organisation of individuals making up pilgrim parties. In the anthropological literature, these groups have been approached analytically from two perspectives -- functionally and structurally (especially as the latter term is applied to the work of Victor Turner). This subject will also be joined again below. The third article is by Mira Reym Binford: "Mixing in the Color of Rām of Rānujā: A Folk Pilgrimage to the Grave of a Rājput Hero-Saint" (1976). This study contains some interesting ethnographic details but severely lacks depth of analysis.

Informative accounts of Christian pilgrims are to be found in J.J. Jusserand, English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages (1950) and Sidney Heath, Pilgrim Life in the Middle Ages (1911).

Another school of students of pilgrimage posits an inherent character in the sacred place as the source of its holiness. These writers tend

to be more mystical than social scientific in perspective, yet, in the absence of an accepted explanation for the existence of holy places, their views cannot be dismissed out of hand. David Spangler, in his report on the Scottish pilgrimage of Iona, presents one such theory to account for holy places in terms of mystical powers. Holy places are called "Cosmic Power Points", and are thought to exist at places where the force field said to surround earth takes an atypical form:

> Cosmic Power Points receive energy from universal sources and transform them to planetary requirements. A spiritual teacher may, for example, use the energy of a cosmic power point to establish his own centre of radiance. That is what St. Columba did on Iona, and it was a common practice amongst the ancient adepts and initiates who had knowledge concerning these power centres and the etheric web.
>
> A power centre is a place where the energies of two or more dimensions or patterns of evolution converge and where the barriers between them are thin. This makes it possible for a consciousness on one dimension or within one pattern of evolution to more easily pierce that barrier, contact the other energy and give it access to this area of life.[1]

A similarly quasi-scientific mode for expressing mystical ideas about sacred palces is encountered in the much-publicised theory of "ley lines". These lines are believed to connect the major religious sites in Britain. The straight paths that join these sites are believed to be lines of altered electro-magnetic and gravitational force, caused by distortions of the earth's crust (e.g., geological faults). The distortion of the normal pattern of forces on the earth's surface results in the occurrence of unexplainable phenomena, which are taken to be the result of super-natural divine powers. John Michell (1969:159) suggests that ancient savants were sensitive to these altered power fields, and recognised them as nodal points for the intersection of the human and divine.

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[1] quoted in William I. Thompson, Passages About Earth, Harper and Row, New York, 1973, pp.169-70.

To the ancient philosophers

> the earth was a living creature and its body, like that of every other creature, had a nervous system within and relating to its magnetic field. The nerve centres of the earth, corresponding on the human body to the acupuncture points of Chinese medicine, were guarded and sanctified by sacred buildings, themselves laid out as microcosms of the cosmic order, the universal body of God.

It is interesting that Fred Clothey, in his study of the centres of pilgrimage of the deity Murukan in Tamil Nadu, India (1972), finds an equivalence between these earthly sacred centres and the six cakras, which, according to Hindu theory, are energy centres within the human body. The attempts of Michell and others to explain these symbolic parallels in quasi-scientific rather than symbolic terms leads them into difficulty because many sacred places are located in areas with no scientifically discernable distortion of gravity or other forces. To attribute the origin of all sacred places to geological formations is to ignore the role of society and culture in favour of a belief in a reified divinity that presents itself on earth in the form of physical forces. Despite the correlation between many pilgrimage centres and exceptional land formations -- mountains, rivers, springs, etc. -- there is no scientific evidence to support Michell's view, and a large number of sacred places in unexceptional locations to contradict it.[1]

A different perspective which also leads to conclusions that pilgrimage places are located where they are for reasons inherent in the place sees a relationship between geographic or demographic features and pilgrimages. The idea was put forth by Robertson-Smith in 1907 in his Lectures on the Religion of the Semites. He observed a correlation between topographical features and sacred sites. More recently, a geographer, Robert Stoddard (1966),

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[1] See also more recent works: Francis Hitching, Earth Magic, Pocket Books, New York, 1976; and Elizabeth Pepper and John Wilcock, Magical and Mystical Sites, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1976.

has attempted to test whether Hindu places of pilgrimage are located at sites determined by the distribution of population and social characteristics in India. His principal finding was that "the major Hindu holy sites are not distributed optimally relative to the Hindu population" (p.115-16). He also found that the ratio of caste Hindus to total population, the female literacy rate and the number of females per thousand males did not correlate with the existence of holy sites in certain places (p.139).

The materials discussed to this point are part of the non-sociological literature dealing with pilgrimage. There is, as well, a body of sociological studies which are more directly related to the subject of this study. There have been a variety of functionalist analyses of pilgrimage. Another group of studies have located the foundations of pilgrimage in individual motivations, channeled by social forces and patterns. The writings of Victor Turner have provided a third perspective of a sociological kind on pilgrimage. I have drawn most heavily upon these three types of analyses of pilgrimage. Since the conclusions that I aim towards are theoretical, detailed review of the existing sociological literature will be delayed until Chapter VIII, where it will be reviewed and also tested against the West Bengali field material. It will then be possible to evaluate critically the various sociological theories of pilgrimage, to adopt what is valid for use in analysing the West Bengali and Hindu cases of the institution, and to synthesise from this exercise the generalisations that will be the subject for the discussions in the concluding chapter.

One area of the literature in which very little information exists regarding West Bengali pilgrimage is village studies. Sacred places of pilgrimage draw their participants almost exclusively from the settled population of their surrounding territory (however broad that might be),

yet a careful search among the village studies that have been done on West Bengal produced little more than an occasional mention of a place of pilgrimage, but certainly no systematic discussion of the relevance of these external religious centres to the internal religious structure of the village. Village studies reviewed were Sarma (1955), Basu (1962), Bose (1963), Chattopadhyay (1964), Bhattacharya and Sinha (1966), Danda (1971), Mukherjee (1971) and Chakraborty and Roy (1972).

(ii) Generalisation and Comparison

This thesis is ultimately seeking generalisation, but the nature of the field work experience has prevented these generalisations from becoming detached from existing behaviour. At points in this study it has been necessary to piece together over-arching patterns of thought and action from fragments gleaned from informants, sacred texts and historical reports. The conclusions that are drawn in these instances do not represent the understanding of any single individual or source, but are rather the most elegant generalisations which accommodate the partial views of many sources of information. Ideally, the generalisations that emerge in these discussions are sufficiently representative of actual categories of thought to approximate a model possessed (in varying parts and measure) by participants, yet, when taken as a whole, are sufficiently clear and encompassing to serve as ideal models useful to the scholar.

Any pilgrimage (in the unconventional usage of the term employed in this study) is part of a wider system of religion. The deities, symbols, myths, rituals, etc., employed in the structured institutional complex centred on any sacred site are drawn from the religious tradition of which that pilgrimage is a part. There can be no virtue, then, in pursuing comparison on the level of ritual behaviour, symbols or meaning,

in pilgrimages which belong to different religious traditions or sub-traditions. This is not the basis of comparison which will be utilised in this study. Rather, accepting that the materials (ideational, material and behavioural) which play a role in pilgrimage practices are principally drawn directly from the particular encompassing religious culture, comparison must be performed between features of the pilgrimage tradition at another level. This deeper level of social structure has both an ideological and a sociological facet, which will be treated in the following two chapters as the philosophical roots and the organisational patterns of pilgrimage in West Bengal.

CHAPTER II

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF THE PILGRIMAGE TRADITION IN WEST BENGAL

a. The Roots of Tradition

Seeking the philosophical underpinnings of a popular tradition brings us squarely to face the question of the relationship between the orthodox sub-continental traditions of Hinduism and their diverse popular forms in the many regional sub-cultures of India. This question has been given several schematic forms: the Sanskrit/non-Sanskrit dichotomy;[1] the Great Tradition/Little Tradition opposition;[2] and unity in diversity.[3] These schema all approach the same problem; is there a pan-Indian socio-cultural tradition, or does the evident diversity of the regions limit the possibilities of generalisation?

The contrast between sub-continental continuity and regional variation is evident in the case of the pilgrimage tradition. The practice of tīrtha-yātrā (making pilgrimage[4]) is one activity tradi-

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[1] cf. M.N. Srinivas, Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1952, p.212.

[2] cf. McKim Marriott, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization", in Marriott (ed.), Village India, University of Chicago Press, 1955, pp.171-222.

[3] cf. Bernard S. Cohn, India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971, p.111, and Philip Mason (ed.), India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity, Oxford University Press, London, etc., 1967.

[4] Yātrā is the Sanskrit; the Bengali is jātrā. One who goes on pilgrimage is a yātri or jātri.

tional in every part of India. One can identify a body of sacred places of national importance visited by persons from all of India's regions (e.g., Benares, Vṛndāvana, Hardwar, Gayā, Rāmeśvara, Puri, etc.), but also sub-systems of pilgrimage which are characteristic of sub-cultural regions. Examples of the latter are found in South India, where there is a tendency to conceptualise clusters of shrines -- the five bhūtaliṅgas sacred to Śiva (infra Ch.III), the six centres of the deity Murukan (Clothey 1972), the six tīrthas of Ayyapan (Padmanabhan n.d.:1) and the five arama-kṣetras in Andhra Pradesh (Srinivasachari 1970-71:217-23). Pilgrimage practices in the northern states frequently involve a holy circuit within the area of the centre, as in Gayā,[1] Nimsar (Saraswati 1965), Vṛndāvana,[2] Varāṇasī[3] and Hardwar (Jameson 1976:33). A 600 mile course around the Himalayan sites above Rishikesh, including Gangotri, Kedarnāth and Badrināth, is sacred for its inclusion of the sources of the three main branches of the Ganges: the Bhāgīrathī, Mandākinī and Alakanandā. The grandest circuit of all is that which covers the entire length of the Ganges, beginning on one bank at the source, travelling to the mouth, then returning up the other bank to the source again. Gujerati pilgrimage tends to encompass the entire region in a circuit of pilgrimage (Sopher 1968). These are but three examples of regional variation on the common

[1]According to Buchanan there are several rounds which pilgrims can make in Gayā, consisting of five (pañca-tīrtha),eight (aṣṭa-tīrtha), 38 or 35 stages on the journey (1936:123-24).

[2]cf. John R. Hinnells and Eric J. Sharpe, Hinduism, Oriel Press, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1972, p.111; Bimanbehari Majumdar, Kṛṣṇa in History and Legend, University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1969, esp. pp.84-100, in which the holy places located on the 168 mile long round of Mathurā are described.

[3]Havell (1968:186 87) discusses two routes of circumambulation in Benares. One is the pañca-tīrtha, which includes five main stations, in the course of visiting which, the pilgrim will see most of the important sites of Benares. The other is the pañca-kōsi road, which encircles the town on a fifty mile route beginning and ending at Maṇikarṇikā. Following this road, Havell states, is "the most meritorious of all pilgrimages" (186).

theme of Hindu pilgrimage.

The unity which is to be found at certain levels of analysis of culture and society in India is undeniable, yet it co-exists with regional diversity. What unifies the diversity and provides a level upon which to perceive unity, is the existence of structural paradigms of meaning and action. Dimock (1963:1-5) has suggested that the diversity to be found in India is limited by patterns which recur throughout the country, so that each region, despite its differences from other regions, expresses the patterns -- the structural paradigmatic aspects -- of the whole. Each regional culture is therefore to be seen as a structural microcosm of the full system, because the regional variation does not disturb significantly the unified underlying patterning deriving from the larger cultural unit. These templates of thought and behaviour provide a structural basis for the elaboration of regional socio-cultural traditions which differ to some extent from each other, but which preserve the fundamental features of the pan-Indian tradition. The most successful study involving this bi-polar perspective on Indian society is that of Dumont (1972), in which the paradigmatic opposition of purity and pollution is found to be of morphological significance in a variety of institutions, practices, beliefs and regions of India. Focusing on Bengal in this study of pilgrimage, one regional religious institution will be explored; the ultimate goal is to elucidate the pan-Indian tradition of tīrtha-yātrā.

In analysing the philosophical roots of the pilgrimage tradition, one need not begin with a full survey of the six systems of Indian philosophy. To do so is beyond the scope of this anthropological study and, in the final analysis, unnecessary. Alternatively, a regional microcosmic standpoint will reveal those fundamental ideas which are

basic to the pilgrimage institution in West Bengal. These core ideas derive from the mainstream of pan-Indian Hinduism and, while perhaps exhibiting regional variation, contain the kernels of idea and practice which are to be found in other regions as well as nationally in India. This chapter discusses: (i) the ideas deriving from supra-regional sources which are the foundations of pilgrimage practice in West Bengal, (ii) how these ideas are given form in regional cult patterns, and (iii) the links between the philosophical ideas (in their cultic forms) and actual pilgrim behaviour in West Bengal.

b. Origins

The Sanskrit and Bengali noun generally translated as 'place of pilgrimage' is tīrtha (root tṛī). This term has several connotations. Monier-Williams defines it as "a passage, way, road, ford, stairs for landing or for descent into a river, bathing-place, place of pilgrimage on the banks of sacred streams, piece of water." Most commonly, the word is given the literal meaning of a ford over water and, in fact, a significant number of the sacred centres of Hinduism are located on the banks of bodies of water. But the literal translation of the term does not account for its uses in other contexts. Tīrtha is the title of an order of sannyāsis of the Śaṅkarācārya school (e.g., Swami Rāmatīrtha (1873-1906) and Mahātmā Purnānanda Tīrtha (1875-1947). It is a term which can be applied to any learned individual. The Padma Purāṇa (quoted in Hazra 1975:113) asserts that a teacher, father, or chaste and devoted wife is a tīrtha. The Yoga Upanishads state: "The water flowing from the washed feet of great men intent on the acquisition of the right knowledge of Brahman and the attainment of real Yoga, O foremost of sages, that is

the Tīrtha for the purification of the mind of the ignorant."[1] In the Skanda Purāṇa it is written "Truth, forgiveness, control of senses, kindness to all living beings and simplicity are tīrthas" (quoted in Bhardwaj 1973:2). It says similarly in the Matsya Purāṇa (Ch.22.80): "the real tīrthas are Satya, Dayā and Indriyanigraha (Truth, Compassion and Self-restraint)" (Agrawala 1963:114). The same chapter continues: "The holy places (tīrtha) are said to be in the houses of those who (abide by the rules) of the castes and the stages (of life)" (Hazra 1975:231). Tīrtha is the 650th name of Śiva in the Liṅga Purāṇa (65.546-60). And the Devī-Bhāgavata (VI.12.26) states that "purity of mind is the best Tīrtha, more holy than Gaṅgā and other sacred places."[2] What the variety of uses of the term share is a symbolic value of holiness ascribed to certain exalted categories of place, state or person. The significance of the symbolism lies in the notion of 'crossing over' (i.e., transition or passage) for, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VIII, the place of pilgrimage is a locus of intersection of the profane and sacred realms, where the individual, by means of ritual, austerities, offering or sacrifice, interacts with the sacred sphere. A learned, purified, initiated or devout individual rises above mundane society to stand between the planes of man and god and so is similarly able to act as a point of intersection, hence 'fording'.

It is commonly suggested that the word tīrtha has come to designate Hindu places of pilgrimage because the earliest pilgrimages were to sites

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[1] T.R. Srinivasa Ayyangar, (trans.), The Yoga Upanishads, The Adyar Library, Madras, 1952, p.133.

[2] Quoted in P.G. Labye, Studies in Devī-Bhāgavata, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1973, p.370.

located beside bodies of water, perhaps following from a Vedic reverence for water or rivers (e.g., Bhardwaj 1973:4). The Artharva Veda (i.6.2-4) states:

2. Within the waters, Soma told me, are all remedies, and Agni (fire) wealful for all

3. O waters, bestow a remedy, protection...for my body, and long to see the sun.

4. Weal for us the waters of the plain, and weal be those of the marshes, weal for us the waters won by digging, and weal what are brought in a vessel; propitious to us be those of rain.

(Whitney 1971:6)

And later (vii.112 (117).1):

Beautiful... are heaven and earth, pleasant near by, of great vows; seven divine waters have flowed; let them free us from distress.
(Whitney 1971:467)

The term _tīrtha_, however, embodies a richness of symbolic value which supports another point of view. The notion of fording, or crossing over, implies a crossing place -- a liminal, median location between realms. A _tīrtha_ is such a place and, in symbolic terms, so is every place of pilgrimage. A common symbolic meaning (i.e., the ford) is that which links all of the uses of the term _tīrtha_ found in the Purāṇas. Although verification of the following conjecture is lost in unrecorded history, it is conceivable that the locating of pilgrimages at the margins of water has occurred in response to and expression of the wider symbolic idea of the ford. Considering the symbolic value of the term _tīrtha_ to be of more fundamental significance than the actual locating of shines by water preserves the link between the designation used to label places of pilgrimage (i.e., _tīrtha_) and the incidence of water-side pilgrimage, but also identifies the other uses of the term _tīrtha_ as symbolically homologous to the place of pilgrimage by water. All _tīrthas_ are sacralised intersections of some kind.

The practice of pilgrimage (tīrtha-yātrā; literally 'travelling to the fords') is given prominence in the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. The earlier Vedas suggest the virtues of travelling and wandering, for "Evil is he who stayeth among men,"[1] but it is in the later texts that the institution reaches full development. In these writings the many sacred centres, their deities, glories and the fruits to be gained by visiting are celebrated at length.[2] The Mahābhārata (c.300 B.C.) devotes a major section of the Aranyakaparvan ('Book of the Forest') to a grand pilgrimage of India,[3] and various Purāṇas[4] (composed from 300-1500 A.D.) glorify numerous shrines throughout India. Still later writings, especially the Tantras, continue to list sacred places and their characteristics. Many of the sacred places of the classical sources still remain important tīrthas, although some have disappeared and new ones arisen. To understand the practice of pilgrimage as it has evolved, we can extract from the religious texts much more than a description of the sacred geography of India. The actual relationship

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[1] Āitareya Brāhmana VII, 15 (A.B. Keith (Trans.) 1920:32).

[2] It has been suggested that the institution of Hindu pilgrimage became celebrated in the post-Vedic period because the costs of Vedic sacrifices were so high that ordinary people could not hope to earn the fruits of such sacrifices. The ṛsis are said to have popularised pilgrimages because of the inability of the masses to participate in these Vedic rites; cf. Sources Orientales (1960:167).

[3] cf. Van Buitenen (1975:372-405) and Bhardwaj (1973:29-56).

[4] The following Purāṇas devote sections to holy places (from Hazra 1975):
Matsya Purāṇa (Chapters 13, 103-112, 186-194)
Padmā Purāṇa (Bengal Recension: "Tīrtha Parvan"; Devanagari Recension: "Bhūmi-parvan")
Varāha Purāṇa (Chapters 126, 137-180, 213-216)
Skanda Purāṇa (2nd Khaṇḍa: "Tīrtha Khaṇḍa")
Vāyu Purāṇa (Chapters 105-112)
Bhāgavata Purāṇa (VII.14-15)
Kūrma Purāṇa (.30-38; II.31, 34-42)
Naradiya Purāna (I.12; II.39- end)
Brahma Purāṇa (Chapters 25, 28-70, 176-177)

between orthodox texts and present-day practices is not easily sorted out, since it is difficult to find data to support any hypothesis of which tradition (the written or the practised) originated first. Nevertheless, the texts are consistently invoked by religious specialists in the places of pilgrimage as the basis and justification for current practice. From the synchronic perspective, the texts operate as validating charters for the popular traditions of pilgrimage, whether or not that is the actual historical relationship between these two strands of Hindu tradition. The texts contain literary material on the philosophical, preceptual and practical nature of Hindu pilgrimage which is relevant to a study of observed practice in India today.

c. The Religious Traditions of West Bengal

On first view, the elements of religious life in Bengal seem bewilderingly complex. One finds thousands of deities and hundreds of methods of worshipping each, dozens of sacred texts and every imaginable type of personal ritual practice. It seems quite unlikely that a system of thought would exist to connect a smooth, round stone resting on a stand under a tree on a busy Calcutta street with the beheading of goats at a rural shrine or the mass feedings of the poor on a festival day. It seems that the contradictions are glaring and irresoluble -- one group preaching pure pacifism and another inciting to blood-letting, one adhering to doctrines of predetermination in life and another undertaking uplifting social welfare projects, one claiming the female deity to be supreme and others the male, and yet others still believing that both are one. But as familiarity grows, a certain order begins to emerge. There are indeed contradictions, but these are comprehensible as divergent branches of the common system of meaning. By penetrating the vast

flesh of cultural artifacts we discover the skeleton of meaning that renders the profusion comprehensible to the populace.

One means of eliciting the core of religious thought in Bengal is provided by indigenous categories. The Bengali, as much as the anthropologist, is confronted with the seemingly infinite variety of symbol, ritual, doctrine, deities, etc., and requires a framework for sorting these out. The religious tradition provides a hierarchical system of categories for the grouping of various elements of the tradition into larger units, and these again into still more encompassing wholes, until ultimately there are only two broadly generalised categories which stand as the main branch channels of religious thought in the region: the Śiva-Śakti Advaitic and the Vaiṣṇava Dvaitic schools of thought.

The essential philosophical difference between Advaitic and Dvaitic thought revolves around the notion of cosmic duality. Both traditions originate in the Vedas (hence the appelation of both schools as 'Vedāntic') and Upaniṣads, but in its doctrine each emphasises different aspects of these teachings. The Vedas are clear in asserting that there is one unified principle underlying the universe and its parts -- the Brahman, the One without a second, "the all-pervading, universally vivifying, omnipresent principle of phenomenal existence" (Zimmer 1953:411). The Brahman is the true reality of perciptible creation. It participates as essence and so is uninvolved as actor -- Brahman is indifferent to the forms and their actions. This is accepted by both Dvaitic and Advaitic Vedānta, and this is the level upon which the traditions are united, agreeing that, in the final analysis, all is Brahman.[1]

[1]e.g., the Artharva Veda (xix.42.1, 2):

> The brāhman is invoker (hotr); the brāhman is the sacrifice; by the brāhman the sacrificial posts are set up; the officiating priest...is born from the brāhman; within the brāhman is put the oblation.
>
> (Whitney 1962:964)

See also Bhagavad Gītā (4:24).

But the conceptual gulf between the all-pervasive, unconcerned absolute and the teeming, suffering, sentient masses who live and die requires a philosophical bridge. It is the latter group that seeks an understanding of the cosmic order from religion and is little satisfied with a doctrine which states with finality "All is All." It is phenomenologically clear that the All is in some sense fracturable.

It is here that the texts present a paradox. Brahman, the supreme, transforms a tiny fraction of his own infinitude into creations. What then is the relationship of these parts to the whole? There are some Vedic passages (abheda śruti) which assert that there is no difference between Brahman and the world of souls, and others (bheda śruti) which classify the god-head and the creations as separate (Ramachandran 1976:9). This philosophical contradiction is the root of the differentiation of the Advaitic and Dvaitic schools.

These philosophical traditions have been treated to much elaboration and interpretation through the centuries. Beyond the fundamental monist-dualist distinction between Advaita and Dvaita, there are six systems of Indian philosophy, each subtle and complex, which are, in turn, divided into sub-schools of thought. Amid the philosophical subtlety and intricacies of these systems it is possible to identify several key doctrines which are particularly relevant to the development of the pilgrimage tradition. These ideas, in both their textual and popular forms, provide the foundations of meaning which make the undertaking of pilgrimage a sensible action for a Hindu.

A. Advaita

The Advaitic philosophy was developed to its most refined heights

and given its strongest formulation by Śaṅkara[1] in his commentaries on the Upaniṣads. Its essential characteristic is its aggressive monism.

(i) The Absolute: Since the foundation of Advaitic thought is the notion of non-duality, it follows that Creation *per se* is not accepted as independently existant. Creation implies change and change mortality. The *Brahman* exists as an undifferentiated whole which appears as the world of objects only in illusion (*māyā*). "The two are one, and the differences are {only} apparent" (Radhakrishnan 1971:461). The phenomenal world masks the radiance of the *Brahman*, which is the totality of Creation, in an apparent, but mistaken, multiplicity. The Absolute for Śaṅkara is without any qualities (*nirguṇa*); it is unthinkable. *Brahman* is undifferentiated being, the sole Reality, of which Creation is an emanation. It is only the ignorance (*avidyā*) of the perceiving beings which makes Creation seem different from *Brahman*.[2]

(ii) The Deities: "The pure, simple, self-subsistent Absolute becomes the personal Lord, the principle of being in the universe binding all things to each other in binding them to himself. Brahman is what is beyond both subject and object. When it becomes subject dealing with an object, we have *Iśvara*..." (Radhakrishnan 1971:556). So it is that the characterless Absolute begins its descent to the realm of beings. Below *Brahman* is *Iśvara*. Although *Iśvara* is god in the highest personalised form, he is still a form in limitation and ignorance (Zimmer 1953:424). *Iśvara* is determinate (*saguṇa*). *Iśvara* is, in turn, comprised of the

[1] cf. Radhakrishnan (1971:445-658) for a detailed account of the life and work of Śaṅkara.

[2] see also Deutsch and van Buitenen (1971:308).

supreme trinity -- Brahmā the Creator, Viṣṇu the Preserver and Śiva the Destroyer. These three are Brahman and Iśvara in an even 'more' phenomenal form: more ignorant, more conscious of self, more limited. The trinity, in turn, is the source of most of the deities in the populous pantheon of Hinduism. These lower creatures are seen to belong to the cosmic process. In the category of organic nature we find four classes of beings: gods, men, animals and plants, in descending order (Radhakrishnan 1971:594). It follows from this doctrine that devotion to deities, even to achieve identity with the realm of the gods (brāhmaloka), is still to fall short of the ultimate goal of release from ignorance in merging with Brahman. However, though falling short, worship of a personal deity is effective for the purification from sin. Śaṅkara's doctrine requires neither rituals nor temples, but he did recommend their use to those who were so trapped in ignorance that frequenting shrines and performing rituals would decrease their ignorance as they proceeded gradually towards liberation (Radhakrishnan 1971:651-52).

(iii) The Self: The ignorance which makes the world of forms appear as different from Brahman also gives the self a sense of differentiation from its source. The Self that radiates from the core of all selves is unknown to the ignorant individual, whose essence lies hidden below five concealing sheaths, "just as a small patch of cloud conceals the sun."[1] The ignorant being finds himself apparently trapped in time and space, and hence in a continuing round of birth and death (saṁsāra, literally: wandering). The actions (karma) of an individual have created the conditions of the present life and will create the future he may expect as well. This is the condi-

[1]Vedāntasāra of Sadananda 52, quoted in Zimmer (1953:416).

tion of existence and it is to this illusory reality that the individual should address himself in life. By developing knowledge of the distinction between things transient and permanent, an unwavering disregard for what is illusion, the practising of concentration and yearning for release, the ignorant self may achieve the Advaitic goal of experiencing "the Universal Self (brahman) as the core and substance (ātman) of his own nature...released at once from the spheres of phenomenality, which are woven of ignorance and shroud the Self in layered veils..." (Zimmer 1953:441). Thus the goal of Advaitic practice (sādhanā) in life is to become jīvanmukti (released in life) by being merged in Brahman, and this release (mokṣa) is the effect of knowledge (vidyā) as opposed to ignorance (avidyā). "The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman" (Nikhilananda 1946:107), says Śaṅkara.

These very concise summaries are the relevant basic ideas of non-dualistic philosophy. Let us look now at their counterpart in Dvaitic (dualistic) thought.

B. Dvaita

About the 12th Century A.D., a revival of Vaiṣṇavism in reaction to the emphatic non-dualism of Śaṅkara gave rise to theories of duality of varying measures. The most extreme position on duality was taken by Madhva (1199-1278),[1] but qualified dualism was espoused as well by Rāmānuja, Viṣṇusvamin (Vallabacharya) and Nimbārka about the same time. Each of these seminal thinkers made his challenge to Śaṅkara by reinterpreting the Vedānta-sutra, to which Śaṅkara had given an absolutely monist

[1]cf. T.P. Ramachandran, Dvaita Vedānta, Arnold-Heinemann Publishers (India), New Delhi, 1976.

interpretation (De 1961:3-4; Majumdar 1969:46-71). The Bengali school of Vaiṣṇavism, which was revitalised and reached its ascendancy under Śri Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya (1485-1533), and which had as its principal theologian Jīva Gosvāmin (b.1535),[1] was perhaps influenced by the thought of Madhva. Caitanya may have encountered this philosophy on his journeys to South India. But this is not likely, as S.K. De has conclusively argued (1961:14-22). It is more probable that the Vaiṣṇava movement in Bengal was an independent revival of dualism, which drew on the classic source of Vaiṣṇava inspiration, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, directly.

As this is the case, we shall look most closely at the dualistic philosophy propounded particularly by the Bengali school.

(i) The Absolute: In the view of Jīva Gosvāmin,[2] the Absolute exists in three gradations of reality, of which *Bhagavat* is the highest. *Brahman* and *paramātma* (supreme soul) are surpassed by *Bhagavat*, which is not formless and impersonal, as the Advaitic *Brahman*, but is possessed of infinite qualities and infinite energising powers (Dimock 1963-64:113). The *Bhagavat* is conceived as a most exalted being, with form (*rūpa*) and personality. He is Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He is at one and the same time the eternal god-head and the manifestation of the god-head in the phenomenal world as an *avatāra*, especially the blue-skinned, dark-eyed cowherd of Vṛndāvana. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is held to be composed of infinite bliss (*ānanda*) as his highest attribute. He has the power to communicate this bliss to his associates

[1] Although the original preceptor of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism was Caitanya, he "was not himself a theologian. He wrote, as far as we know, a total of eight verses in his lifetime, and these were devotional, not theological verses" (Dimock 1963-64:110).

[2] The principal writing by Jīva Gosvāmin which forms the core of the theology of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism is his *Saṭsaṃdharbha* which is translated from Sanskrit in summary by De (1961:193-320).

and devotees. His associates, residence, devotees, etc., are all parts or functions of himself, in fact, but it is only divine sport (līlā) consisting of pure and infinite bliss, that he enjoys with these emanations of his infinitude.

The first cause of Creation is Śrī Kṛṣṇa. From him all Creation grows forth as his līlā. This is clearly expressed in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, where Creation is likened to the parts of the actual body of the god-head:

> His body is the essence of all things. The heaven and the sun form his eyes and all colours and light are his sense of seeing. His nostril is the vital breath and the sky and sound have their origin in his sense of hearing. All different kinds of tastes are his tongue. His arms are the eight quarters. His hairs are the trees and plants. His bones are the source of mountains. His stomach is the source of food and of the oceans. His veins and arteries are the rivers and tributaries. Cloud, lightning, elements, everything that there is form different parts of his body. His mind is the source of sciences, of righteousness and of goodness.
>
> (quoted in Brahmachari 1974:160)

The Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal (called Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, since they come from Gauda, i.e., Bengal) assert the identity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the founder of their cult, Śrī Caitanya. The relationship of Brahman and paramātma to Bhagavat for the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavas is expressed in these lines from the Caitanya Caritāmṛta (Adi Lila, Chapter II)

> What the Upanishads call one Brahman (without a second) is the halo of the body of Lord Chaitanya. What is named as Paramatma is but the partial manifestation of the Lord. And what is called Bhagavan (Bhagavata) possessed of six Divine attributes is He Himself. There is no other higher truth than Lord Chaitanya Krishna.
>
> (Goswamin 1959:14)

(ii) The Deities: The Bhagavat -- Śrī Kṛṣṇa -- has known many manifestations, "numberless, like the ripples on an inexhaustible reservoir" (De 1961:315). Among these are the perfect avatāras Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, who, nevertheless, remain inferior embodiments of divine bliss,

which reaches its highest perfection in Kṛṣṇa alone. The deities besides Śrī Kṛṣṇa are only demi-gods who are derived from him:

> None knows from whence I came -- not the gods celestial host nor yet the mighty seers; for I am the beginning of the gods {themselves} as of the mighty seers and all in every way. (Bhagavad Gītā 10.2; Zaehner 1969:78)

And later (10.8), Kṛṣṇa asserts that he is the creator of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. The deities are repositories of great powers, but these are only fractions of the infinite qualities and powers of Kṛṣṇa.

(iii) The Self: The jīva (human individual) shares a portion of the infinite qualities of the Bhagavat. The "absolute radiates to manifest itself, not as one, but as many" (Brahmachari 1974:135). These rays of the Bhagavat constitute the human population and the rest of Creation as The jīva is, however, obscured from the highest experience of Kṛṣṇa by māyā (illusion). Māyā "obscures the essential nature of jiva from themselves and induces in them a fondness for material objects" (Majumdar 1969:289). The individual in his life can lift the cloud of māyā, have conveyed to him an atom of the bliss of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and experience this bliss as a subjective emotion by means of the practice of bhakti (devotion) (Dimock 1963-64:114). Bhakti takes innumerable forms, but all share the central feature of propagating pure devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. There cannot be any desire in the devotee for release from māyā, nor for the bliss of this achievement, because the individual who seeks for himself is not a pure devotee. The bhakta (devotee) must be the perfect selfless devoted lover, with Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the beloved (Dimock 1963-64:114). There could not be this perfect relationship of lover and beloved between the individual and the Bhagavat in a situation of non-duality, hence the insistence on duality in Vaiṣṇava doctrine.

The philosophical ideas summarised above are tied to the pilgrimage tradition through the cults of Hinduism of West Bengal. The cults give

practical expression and shape to doctrine in the regional religious system.

d. The Cults

There are no statistical data to show how the population of West Bengal orients itself with respect to the dominant sects of Hinduism in the state. But, as the following chapter will detail, almost all places of pilgrimage in the state are sacred to one of three deities: Viṣṇu, Śakti and Śiva. Śiva by himself is found in only one important tīrtha, leaving the pattern of Hinduism in West Bengal to be dominated by two main religious forces -- the cults of Śiva-Śakti and Vaiṣṇavism.[1]

That the Śaiva and Śākta cults in West Bengal can be considered aspects of a single tradition is well-attested. The worship of the female deity has great significance in Bengal, as the region is one of the principal strongholds of goddess (devī) worship in India. Devī takes many forms, all of which are different manifestations of the universal primeval energy (śakti). This force is the inherent counterpart of the inert, material, male (puruṣa) aspect of Creation. Male and female, deified as Śiva and Śakti, are seen as complementary parts of a whole. The totality is Iśvara, for Brahman is indivisible. The material aspect of Iśvara is Śiva and the active aspect Śakti (Nikhilananda 1946:61). Radhakrishnan has it: "Siva and Sakti are one, since force is inherent in existence" (1971:735). The united male and female are frequently given the obvious symbolic form of posing Śiva and Śakti as a married couple. In Bengal, the complementarity is expressed in the well-known phrase "Śiva without Śakti is a corpse" (śiva śaktihīna śava) (Nicholas 1972:2).

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[1]There are, of course, many minor sects and religious systems in Bengal besides these dominant two; cf. especially Shashibhusan Das Gupta, Obscure Religious Cults, Firma KLM Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1976.

The Śaiva-Śākta and Vaiṣṇava cults do not take the form of exclusive and opposed religious communities in Bengal. The population cannot be neatly divided by the criterion of cult membership. Both cults are intimately part of one religious system and, though manifestly different, share a great deal of imagery, symbolism and doctrine. They are true to the statement by Louis Renou (1962:45) that a cult "adheres to a specific part of tradition...but it neither isolates itself from the totality of the system nor rejects the common postulates." The Śaiva-Śākta cult accepts Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa as deities, although these are, in the final Advaitic analysis, parts of Brahman. The Vaiṣṇavas, in turn, recognise the divinity of Śiva and Śakti, although they maintain that these demi-gods are inferior to Kṛṣṇa. It must be recognised that the Vedas and Upaniṣads are the literary sources of both traditions. While each interprets these texts to its own liking, each can claim for its supreme deity only the superior, not exclusive, role and position. In the popular tradition and in the practice of the majority of Bengalis, who are not concerned with the subtleties of monism and dualism, all deities are seen as powerful beings holding influence over human life.

Membership in a cult of Bengali Hinduism is very much a matter of orientation and degree. Both cults include among their followers a wide range of individual adherents, from zealous ascetics who are willing to fight physically for the advancement of their cause to indifferent householders who have inherited from past generations the worship of one deity rather than another. Each cult respects its own sacred calendar, places of pilgrimage, deities, festivals, rituals, personal religious practices, doctrines, and so on, but these do not invest the group of followers with any coherence or corporateness. Nor is there universal agreement on what is accepted within one cult. What we find are individuals,

families and a variety of small institutions which draw inspiration from the doctrines of the cult, as developed and expounded by its many preceptors and interpretors. On examination, the broadest categories which have been identified -- the two traditions -- repeatedly subdivide into smaller and smaller opposed and allied groups. The cults do not exist as organised bodies; they are rather categories into which individuals and groups can be sorted according to the orientation that they profess in belief and practice. There will be, then, variety within both cults, as the substance and degrees of orientation are endless. There is also a segment of the population between the two main currents which has no distinct orientation to either the Vaiṣṇava or Śaiva-Śākta cults. It is nevertheless possible, and indeed illuminating, to focus on the dominant traditions. This is especially true in the study of pilgrimage, as shrines and temples tend to represent the established orthodoxy of the cults, and hence fall into the mainstream of their branch of Bengali Hinduism. These branches exhibit evident differences from one another, deriving from the philosophical traditions of Hinduism which have been discussed above. It is these sub-cultural traditions which give shape to belief and practice in the institutionalised practices of Bengali Hinduism, including that of pilgrimage.

e. The Śaiva-Śākta Pilgrimage Tradition

Pilgrims in India undertake tīrtha-yātrā for a great variety of reasons. Two types of pilgrimage, distinguished by pilgrims' motives, can be identified in the Śaiva-Śākta pilgrimage tradition in West Bengal. This classification will later be shown to mask an underlying unity of motivation for Hindu pilgrimage, but still has some validity at this stage of the argument. One group of pilgrims, the minority, seeks spiritual

ends from their pilgrimage. The majority, however, pursues more earthly rewards, such as wealth, happiness, children, health, marriage, etc. Both of these categories can be understood within the bounds of Advaitic thought. The former seek knowledge of Brahman, while the latter, lost in ignorance, seek to tap the power of Iśvara or his even more limited forms for immediate, albeit illusory, rewards.

It should be immediately obvious why pilgrims seeking Brahman should be numerically many fewer than those pursuing earthly rewards. The texts of Advaita, and Śaṅkara himself, are clear in castigating rituals as insufficient means for achieving knowledge of Brahman. Since the Absolute is everywhere and in everything, why visit temples, undertake sacrifices, worship images, etc.? These are no more Brahman than any more mundane artifacts of māyā. It is not disputed that rituals have some effect -- for the gods are acknowledged to have (limited) power -- but these sorts of action (karma) are held to yield only limited fruit (phala). The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad acknowledges that rituals bring one to the god-realm, but not to Brahman:

> Saying to him "Come! Come!" the splendid offerings
> Carry the sacrificer with the rays of the sun,
> Addressing pleasant speech, praising and saying
> "This is your meritorious (punya) Brahma-world, gained
> by good works."
> (1.2.6.)

But this is insufficient:

> Thinking sacrifice and merit the chiefest thing,
> Naught better do they know -- deluded!
> Having had enjoyment on the top of heaven won by good works,
> They re-enter this world, or a lower.
> (1.2.10; Hume 1971:368-69)

What emerges, then, is a concept of higher and lower practices. The former are superior, but the latter have their effect as well. Pilgrimage falls squarely into the latter category.

In the lower category of practices in the Advaitic view, one still operates behind the veil of māyā. By attempting to propitiate godlings or perform meritorious acts in order to accumulate merit (puṇya), one accepts the world of birth, death and rebirth. What is significant for the institution of pilgrimage is that the majority of people remain in ignorance, and so pursue lower practices which will not gain them release. Śaṅkara states:

> The srutis would not declare that {Ātman} is by nature unrelated to rituals, by nature unconnected with the class and other factors of rituals, if it were not desirable that the rituals and such requisites of rituals as the sacred thread be abandoned completely. Therefore the seeker after final release should abandon the ritual together with its requisites...
>
> (Deutsch and van Buitenen 1971:132)

This statement clearly differentiates higher from lower practices. While the latter are to be abandoned at some point in the search for knowledge of Brahman, they nevertheless possess some acceptability to bring one to the point of their abandonment.

But for the majority of people, including pilgrims, and in the popular tradition, it is the concrete earthly rewards of meritorious actions which are sought. Trapped behind the veil of illusion, caught in suffering, they seek by their actions to reduce their misery, not gain release. The Bengali Śākta devotional poet Rāmprasād acknowledges that the Goddess "gives freedom to one out of a hundred thousand" (quoted in Zimmer 1953:566). What of the others? It is not that they are barred from liberation, but that they are so mired in the falsehood of māyā that they do not even choose to pursue liberation. They seek simply an end to pain and an increase in pleasure. Let us look at how pilgrimage accomplishes this goal.

The cycle of births and deaths (saṁsāra), in which all jīvas are caught, is a round of recurring misery. The key to understanding this

cycle is the law of karma, which is connected to that of saṁsāra. As a joint doctrine,[1] it asserts that "death does not terminate one's existence. All it does is to initiate a new existence, the conditions of which are determined by one's actions in previous existences" (Brown 1966:81). The ultimate teaching which this doctrine embodies is that one who wishes to be free of this endless cycle must attain knowledge of Brahman. But inherent in it also is the fact that right actions in the present, possessed of merit, produce improvements in the condition of one's future, although not liberation. Meritorious actions are rewarded. This is an impersonal law of return which is popularly believed to be administered by the gods, who determine what is meritorious by what pleases them. What will do so is well spelled out in the sacred texts, so that an individual may know exactly what action to undertake to gather merit which will result in a decrease of suffering in the future. Following the rituals and good actions indicated in the texts is meritorious, earns the favour of the gods, and so returns to the doer improvement in this or a future life.

One form of ritual which earns puṇya is the worship of a deity. This is the act of pūjā, which recurs in Hindu ritual on all levels.[2] Ideally, in the non-dualist system, worship is a tool for bringing the devotee closer to the knowledge of Brahman: "Worship and devotions enable a beginner to fix his mind on God and strengthen his power of concentration" (Nikhilananda 1946:38).[3] But in the popular tradition of Śaiva-Śākta ritualism, pūjā is meant to please the deity and to earn the rewards of so doing.

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[1]Described in detail in the Bṛhad-āranyaka Upaniṣad (iv.3.37; iv.4.1-5 and 9.7) and Kaṭha Upaniṣad (I.I.5-6).

[2]Regarding pūjā, see Woodroffe (1965:539-50), and Thomas J. Hopkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition, Dickenson Publishing Co., Encino, 1971, pp.110-12.

[3]See also Zimmer (1953:587).

The Artharva Veda is a storehouse of information on how to please the various deities, for every conceivable difficulty, from insufficient hair on the head to winning the favour of a woman, to countering the effects of poison. The ritualism of the Vedas became even more developed in the later Brāhmana texts.

One particularly important and meritorious aspect of worship in Hinduism is sacrifice. This act, like pūjā itself, has a gross and a subtle form. Certain texts (e.g., Rudhirādhyāya portion of the Kālikā Purāṇa (Blaquiere 1807)) claim that human heads and blood are the most favoured of sacrifices (cf. Payne 1933). But in present-day common practice, the offering of sacralised objects, such as flowers, incense, water, milk, ghī (clarified butter), and the like, is the most accepted form of sacrifice. Blood sacrifices continue to be popular in the temples of the goddess in Bengal. All offerings which are given over and consumed in ritual are homologous to sacrifices because they perform the same functions as the sacrificial object, which Hubert and Mauss (1963:97) identify as principally mediating between the sacred and profane realms. Any offering, including sacred syllables, vegetables and animals, places before the deity an object which stimulates the deity to respond. The sacrificial object is a medium to produce a desirable, divinely-inspired action. As Radhakrishnan says (1953:46):

> By means of sacrifice we 'set in motion' the cosmic forces dealt with and get from them the desired result.

Another practice which induces a response from the deity is the undertaking of voluntary austerities (tapas).[1] Woodroffe (1965:564) lists

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[1]The word is a complex one:

> The Sanskrit noun tapas assumes various convergent and divergent loads of meaning in the Vedic literature. Central to all such meanings, however, is the notion of

four possible motives for the performance of tapas: (1) with faith and without regard to its fruit, (2) for its fruit, (3) through pride, to gain honour, respect or power, and (4) through ignorance, to injure or destroy others. We are most concerned here with that of the second kind. The practice of austerities is seen as a great source of power in the Hindu tradition. The immortality of the gods was granted to them because of their sacrifices and tapas (Taittiriya Upaniṣad VIII,4,2,1). Knowledge of Brahman and ultimate release come from tapas (ibid III,2,i). Śakti, in the form of Pārvatī, won her union with Śiva by austerities (Śiva Purāṇa 2.3.21.26-8, cited in O'Flaherty 1973:153). The powers of Rāvaṇa, the demon king of Laṅkā in the Rāmāyaṇa were awesome and were gained by tapas:

> Where he is, there the sun does not give out its heat; the winds through fear of him do not blow; the fire ceases to burn; and the ocean, crowned with rolling billows, becomes motionless.
>
> (I.xiv.17)

> "heat" or "warmth." Tapas thus refers to natural heat, associated with biological conception, embryonic "maturation," and birth. Thus the heat of sexual desire, the heat of sexual excitation, and the heat generated during sexual intercourse are all rendered by the term tapas. In a related context, that heat generated by a hen as she "broods" upon her eggs, that "hatching heat" so to speak necessary for birth, is also rendered by the noun tapas. Tapas, however, also refers to the heat of asceticism, to the heat generated by austerities, and thus to a voluntary and "nonnatural" heat. Relatedly, tapas refers not only to the heat generated through asceticism but to the practice of asceticism itself. In addition, tapas refers to "severe meditation," an intellectual "brooding," related to the natural, physical "brooding" of a hen upon her eggs. These meanings, however, in no way exhaust the word.
>
> (Kaelber 1976:343).

It remains true, however, that "tapas, particularly in the Śaivite mythology, becomes synonymous with asceticism" (ibid p.383). Among the Śāktas as well "Tapas {is} a term which includes all forms of ascetic austerity" (Woodroffe 1965:564).

Popular tradition holds that one compels the deity to yield those things within his power by means of austerities.[1]

Tying together the notions of worship, sacrifice and austerities, one may see the essential practices of pilgrimage to the shrines of Śiva and Śakti in West Bengal. The journey itself is an austerity. It is preferred to go on pilgrimage by walking, and even moreso by walking barefoot. The Matsya Purāṇa (Ch.105.vv.4-5) warns: "One who goes to Prayāga in a conveyance goes to hell and his libations are refused." Havell (1968:187) states that the fifty mile pañca-kōsi road encircling Benares is to be traversed barefoot by pilgrims. Pilgrims to Tarakeswar in West Bengal will frequently walk the 34 miles from the Ganges to the shrine as a voluntary austerity, and cases were encountered of individuals measuring the length of their bodies in prostrations as they went. Pilgrims have been known to perform their journeys crawling on their sides, walking on their ankles, with their mouths tied, locked or banded, and frequently with a vow of celibacy (Bharati 1963:140-41). Although improvements in communications have made many previously remote shrines accessible, a value still remains on self-imposed austerities en route. It is also true that the tapas of pilgrimage has been lessened only somewhat by the third-class trains and country buses of India.

The sacrificial aspect of pilgrimage is found in the process of making offerings to the deity. These offerings are an almost invariable

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[1]Monier Williams, in his Indian Wisdom (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, 1963), pp.344-45n., likens this notion to a heavenly credit system:

> The performance of tapas or austerities was like making deposits in the bank of heaven. By degrees an enormous credit was accumulated, which enabled the depositor to draw to the amount of his savings, without fear of his drafts being refused payment. The merit and power thus gained by weak mortals was so enormous that gods as well as men were equally at (their) mercy...

feature of a visit to a pilgrimage shrine, perhaps because of the importance of the offering as a medium of communication between the pilgrim and the deity he has gone to meet at the tīrtha. Fruits, flowers, goats, money, rice, precious items, clothing, sacred water, milk, ghī, sweets, fingernails, personal blood and other sacralised items are offered to the presiding god of the temple. The sacrifice is an important act in Śaiva-Śākta pilgrimage.

The context within which the offering is made is the pūjā. The sacred formulae of worship, which involve the mediation of a priestly (usually Brāhmaṇ) specialist, provide the ritual structure for the approach to the deity, and invest the actions undertaken with their symbolic and sacred meaning. Pūjā ensures that the deity will be pleased by the actions of the pilgrim because behaviour will be structured to conform to predetermined formulae. Pūjā of some sort is performed by almost every pilgrim in the place of pilgrimage.

Tapas, offering and worship are the three principal behavioural traits of Śaiva-Śākta pilgrimage. Although in the Advaitic view pilgrimage is a lower form of spiritual activity, the practices it entails are justified because ritual is meant to bring one closer to the truth of the Absolute Brahman. But it is also asserted that the effect of performing rituals is purificatory. It is for this reason that the Garuḍa Purāṇa directs:

> So long as one does not reach Truth, so long should he do austerities, vows, pilgrimage to sacred waters, recitations, oblations, worship and reading of the prescribed texts of the Vedas and Sastras.
> (XVI:98-99)

The purifying aspects of pilgrimage can be seen in the Vedas. The Aītareya Brāhmaṇa of the Ṛg-Veda states:

Flower-like the heels of the wanderer,
His body groweth and is fruitful;
All his sins disappear,
Slain by the toil of his journeying.[1]

In actual practice, the purificatory rituals of pilgrimage are given concrete form in the bath (snāna) which is a concomitant of most pilgrimages.[2] Of the 84 tīrthas which were found by Bhardwaj to be most frequently cited in the sacred texts, 58 were located on water (1973:87).[3] Places of pilgrimage which do not have natural water nearby will always have a man-made channel or pond for the purpose of bathing. The purifying functions of water are celebrated in the Ṛg-Veda:

Whatever sin is found in me, whatever evil I have wrought,
If I have lied or falsely sworn, Waters, remove it far from me.
(X.ix.8)[4]

The Mahābhārata (3(33)80:85) says of the tīrtha Dṛmi "which absolves all evil...By bathing there and worshipping Rudra {Śiva} in the midst of the host of Gods, a man pushes off all evil he has done since his birth."[5] In the same Tīrtha-yātrā section of the Mahābhārata, which describes a grand tour of the sacred places of India, bathing at various tīrthas is consistently associated with purification: -"bathing there...one's soul (is) cleansed of all evil" (3(33)80:100) -"bathing there a brahmin becomes pure like the moon" (3(33)80:95) -"by bathing there one shines like the moon and obtains the rewards of a gift of a thousand cows" (3(33)80:120).

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[1] A.B. Keith (trans.) quoted in Bhardwaj (1973:3).

[2] There are many other purificatory rites practised on different pilgrimages, e.g., śrāddha rituals for the removal of death pollution, shaving rites, expiations, etc. Bathing is the most common by far (cf. Bharati 1963: 138-39).

[3] Cf. Bharati 1963:161-62 as well.

[4] Ralph T.H. Griffith (trans.), The Hymns of the Ṛg Veda, Vol. II, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, 1963, p.391.

[5] This and subsequent references to the Mahābhārata are from the van Buitenen (1975) translation.

The Matsya Purāṇa (Chapters 67,68,102) credits bathing with removal of sin, curing of diseases, granting longevity, prosperity and peace of mind.[1]

The act of self-purification is meritorious, and hence one accumulates puṇya by bathing. The Mahābhārata lists the rewards of the purificatory bath on pilgrimage: a thousand cows, gold, freedom from disease, the equivalent of the fruits of sacrifice, increased offspring, prosperity, etc.[2] It is also mentioned, although infrequently, that pilgrimage brings one closer to the knowledge of Brahman (e.g., 3(33)81:45).

It is tempting to see in the pursuit of such earthly rewards of the purificatory pilgrimage a decline from the spiritual goal of mokṣa. Sumption makes the case in his historical analysis of medieval Christian pilgrimage that the increased importance given to the accumulation of dispensations rather than to the spiritual quest of the pilgrimage marked a decline from personal spiritual endeavour to formal, debased ritualism (1975:289-302). The same cannot be said for Hindu pilgrimage. As far back as the Artharva Veda, the earthly (artha: literally material advantage, earthly ends) fruits of the purificatory bath were extolled:

> Within the waters, Soma told me, are all remedies,
> and Agni (fire) wealful for all.
> (1:6.2)

The dual path of liberation and earthly reward have co-existed from early in the development of Hindu religious thought as two alternative sorts of activity, albeit one exalted and the other somewhat debased in the eyes of pure non-dualists. The Agni Purāṇa, which considers pilgrimage as

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[1] A Taluqdar of Oudh (trans.), Matsya Purāṇa, Part I, Sudhindra Nath Vasu, Allahabad, 1916.

[2] See also Diehl (1956:244-245) for a discussion of the fruits of bathing at various South Indian tīrthas.

"adding to the spiritual merit of the pilgrim" holds that "a visit to these places by the pilgrim ensures earthly enjoyment and salvation here-after."[1] Both are inherent in the ritual, though on different levels.

The roots of Śaiva-Śākta pilgrimage are compound, but it and its elements fit well within the fold of Advaitic thought. Sacred texts invariably extoll meditation and personal realisation over rituals as a means of spiritual advancement, but the central doctrines of the school render the practice of rituals acceptable as well. The single act of pilgrimage combines the separately efficacious practices of austerities, sacrifice and worship. Thus the performance of pilgrimage is especially purificatory and meritorious. The fruit of karma that a pilgrim seeks by his action is most commonly of an earthly sort because of the distinction in Advaitic thought between the pursuit of mokṣa, which is little served by rituals, and the improvement of life within the round of birth and rebirth, for which ritual is effective. Pilgrimage, being a compound of rituals, is an especially effective performance for attaining the boons of the deities because of its merit-producing and purificatory effects.

f. The Vaiṣṇava Pilgrimage Tradition

Advaitic philosophy distinguishes the practice of ritual from the more esteemed activities enjoined upon seekers. The Bengali followers of Dvaita, in contrast, see all religious activities as variations on the unitary theme of devotion. The activities by which a devotee achieves the ultimate goal of the cult -- to dwell in the loving presence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa -- are fully commensurate with the practice of ritual, including pilgrimage.

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[1] S.D. Gyani, Agni Purana, A Study, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, 1964, pp.216-17.

The performance of bhakti by a devotee is most concerned with the attitude with which things are done. One who stages a huge and costly ritual for his own aggrandisement is said to achieve less in the eyes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa than a true devotee who offers a simple flower, but with love and longing in his heart. Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gītā:

> He who offers me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, that devout offering of a pure-minded one I accept.
> (9.26)

The Bengali Vaiṣṇavas designate the worshipful attitude which the devotee assumes towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa as bhāva and the personal experience of the love relationship between the bhakta and his divine beloved as rasa. Much of the literature of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism[1] is devoted to instructions regarding bhāva and descriptions -- often in explicitly erotic imagery -- of rasa.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme personality of the god-head. In the mythology of this deity, especially in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa which is much revered by Vaiṣṇavas, the līlās of Kṛṣṇa are enumerated and described. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas expecially revere the līlā of Kṛṣṇa as the blue-skinned cowherd of Vṛndāvana. There, in the eternal, heavenly Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa sported with his family, friends, and most intimately with the cowherd girls, the Gopīs. The bhakta, in adopting a worshipful attitude towards Kṛṣṇa (i.e., a bhāva), assumes the attitude of one of Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana associates (the pārṣadas), one for which his own personality is suited. The devotee immerses himself in the love of the intimate for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and transforms himself into that devoted person. Śrī Caitanya, in his bhāva of Rādhā (Kṛṣṇa's beloved), became Rādhā. Since he was also an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, this combination of bhāva and avatāra accounts in part for present conceptions

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[1]Particularly two works by Rūpa Gosvāmin entitled Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu and Ujjvala-nīlamaṇi, summarised in De (1961:166-224).

of Caitanya as both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in one.

The *bhāvas* which a devotee can assume have been classified into five basic types:

> 1. *Śānta*-*bhāva*, the emotions which one feels when he considers Kṛṣṇa as the supreme deity: awe, humbleness, and insignificance;
> 2. *Dāsa*-*bhāva*, the emotion which a servant feels toward a master: respect, subservience, dedication;
> 3. *Vatsālya*-*bhāva*, parental or fraternal affection, such as the parents and brother of Kṛṣṇa feel toward him;
> 4. *Sākhya*-*bhāva*, the love which a friend feels for a friend, which the cowherd boys felt for Kṛṣṇa;
> 5. *Madhurya*-*bhāva*, the highest and most intimate emotion of love of lover for beloved, which the Gopīs felt for Kṛṣṇa.
>
> (Dimock 1963-64:116)

By means of practising *bhāvas*, the devotee cuts through the veil and attachments of *māyā* and experiences an intimate relationship with Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The decision of which *bhāva* to assume is the responsibility of the *bhakta*'s preceptor (*guru*). The *guru* is expected to be one who has cast off the illusion of *māyā* and who is thus able to guide the devotee to do the same. The *guru* will assign a *bhāva* to the *bhakta* according to his enlightened understanding of the devotee's needs. He will also instruct the aspirant to undertake certain practices in which he is to adopt and perfect his *bhāva*. Jīva Gosvāmin, commenting on the work of Rūpa Gosvāmin, summarises eleven stages in the preliminary practices of devotion (*vaidhī*-*bhakti*):

1. Saraṇāpattih: resorting to Kṛṣṇa as one's only refuge;
2. Guru-sevā: service to the spiritual guide;
3. Śravaṇa: listening to accounts of Kṛṣṇa, especially from the Bhāgavata;
4. Kīrtana: singing the name and praises of Kṛṣṇa;
5. Smaraṇa: fixing one's thoughts on the name, form and *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa;
6. Pada-sevā: seeing, touching or circumambulating the deity, residence in the temple or in some sacred place, pilgrimage, bathing in holy waters;
7. Arcanā: rites learned from the preceptor, putting Vaiṣṇava signs on one's body, taking the remains of offerings to the deity, drinking the water used to wash the feet of the deity, etc.;
8. Vandana: prostrating before the image;
9. Dāsya: feeling subservient and serving the deity;
10. Sakhya: friendship towards the deity;
11. Ātma-nivedana: complete self-surrender and dedication of one's whole being to Kṛṣṇa.

(De 1961:369-72; Dimock 1963-64:117-18)

Pilgrimage falls under pada-sevā, literally 'serving the feet' of the deity. This term indicates that for the Vaiṣṇavas, pilgrimage is a vehicle through which one personally benefits from encounters with holy places and people, and thereby is better able to humbly serve the deity.

By bhakti with a proper disposition one actualises intense personal emotional experiences. It is conceivable that the Vaiṣṇavas would adopt an attitude similar to pure Advaitists in denigrating an overt ritual act such as pilgrimage in favour of refined spiritual practices. This is not the case, however. There is virtue in visiting sacred places. The source of this virtue is integrally a part of Vaiṣṇava theology and philosophy.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa has made his appearance in the world as an avatāra. This manifest form of the Bhagavat is simultaneously the ethereal and earthly forms of Kṛṣṇa. The mythology of Kṛṣṇa is very explicit about the places of his līlā, and these places (dhāmas) are celebrated because Kṛṣṇa is eternally present at those locations. The intimate relationship which the bhakta seeks to initiate with Śrī Kṛṣṇa is cast in the mold of the relationships which the mythology celebrates as having taken place between Kṛṣṇa and his associates in specific dhāmas. The goal of the bhakta is to reside, like a Gopī, friend or relative of Kṛṣṇa, in the place of Kṛṣṇa's līlā.

The theory of Kṛṣṇa's manifestations proposes that his descents to the mundane world continue forever in the dhāmas.[1] Furthermore, the places of līlā on earth are but replicas of the eternal divine places of Kṛṣṇa's residence. For "just as the form or Vigraha of the Bhagavat makes its appearance in the world, so it is said that Dhāma, Pada of Residence also sometimes makes its appearance" (De 1961:292). Jīva Gosvāmin asserts that

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[1]Dhāma also has a sense of 'lustre', referring to Kṛṣṇa's inherent power of manifestation (De 1961:291).

the dhāma of Kṛṣṇa appears in three forms, as Dvārakā, Mathurā and Gokula, to accompany the different manifestations of the deity. De (1961:336) explains:

> These places are also not merely sacred places of worship or pilgrimage (upāsanā-sthānāni) where the deity remains in a subtle form (sūkṣma-rūpatā) or in the form of an image (śrīmat-pratimā-rūpatā), but they are expressly declared to be the actual (sākṣāt) places of personal residence of the deity. It is already made clear that these two sets of Lokas are in their essence identical, but one set is said to be a replica (prakāśa-viśeṣa) of the other.

In the earthly places of Kṛṣṇa's līlā, he manifests "both his prākṛta (mundane) and aprākṛta (celestial) līlās" (Majumdar 1969:287). Kṛṣṇa is believed to sport eternally in these three dhāmas.

Dvārakā, Mathurā and Gokula (Vṛndāvana) are among the most sacred of pilgrimage places for the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.[1] But since Kṛṣṇa is acknowledged to have had many avatāras, numerous also are the dhāmas suitable for the pada-sevā of pilgrimage. Particularly sacred to the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas are all the places of līlā of Śrī Caitanya, whom they consider an avatāra of Kṛṣṇa. Foremost among these places is Navadvip, the site of his birth and home. Since Caitanya is equated with Kṛṣṇa in the Gauḍīya sacred literature, it is predictable that Navadvip in Bengal is identified with both the earthly and the heavenly Vṛndāvana of Kṛṣṇa.

It is meritorious for Vaiṣṇavas simply to go to the tīrthas, but the merit increases proportional to the amount of devotion present in the heart of the devotee. The Vaiṣṇavas do not stress the accumulation of merit through tīrtha-yātrā, rather considering that this activity will yield the rewards expected from any successful devotional practice: the subjective emotions of devotion in the present, and eternal residence with Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the future. Pilgrimage, like all bhakti, must be productive of increased

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[1] Cf. Law 1937.

devotion in the bhakta or it is considered as useless as the knowledge of the non-dualist. Pilgrims whose hearts are possessed of an effective bhāva may taste the rasa to be earned by devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Only those devotees whose hearts are brimming with humble devotion can expect to perceive the eternal qualities of the places which they visit on pilgrimage, and so come to see and experience Śrī Kṛṣṇa in his eternal līlā in these terrestrial dhāmas.

It should be noted that the importance of the purity of the devotee is emphasised in Vaiṣṇavism as it was in the Śaiva-Śākta tradition. According to Rūpa Gosvāmin, the physical body is not eligible to reach the realm of Kṛṣṇa. Only the senses, purified by the many means of bhakti, can be transported to the eternal dhāma of the Bhagavat.[1]

The principal rewards earned through devotion are the love of Kṛṣṇa and residence in his heavenly abode. Jīva Gosvāmin recognised, however, that such other-worldly goals would not suit the character and needs of every devotee. It is therefore allowed that devotion can also be turned to the procurement of earthly good. Acts of bhakti which are accompanied by a desire for the fruit of the action are sakāmā (with desire), while those which are simply and purely devoted are niṣkama-karmasahita (De 1961:361). Pilgrimage, as an act of devotion, can be for either of these purposes, although the latter is far more exalted than the former.

The devotional practices of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas take many forms. Pilgrimage often involves the performance of more than one kind of devotion. The bhakta-pilgrim will visit the holy place, prostrate to the deity, touch the image and circumambulate it, perhaps bathe in holy waters, participate in devotional singing, listen to a sacred discourse or make an offering to his guru, The doctrines of the cult allow for many practices, emphasising

[1]Rūpa Gosvāmin, Bhakti-Rasāmṛta-sindhuh, Tridaṇḍi Swāmī Bhakti Hṛdaya Bon Mahārāj (trans.), Institute of Oriental Philosophy, Vrindaban, India, 1965, p.233.

that it is not so much the outward content of action as the inward attitude and emotion which is significant. Pilgrimage, or any of these devotional acts, or any combination of them, are all categorised as outward acts which are to be judged by the intentions of the actor.

The axial notion of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism is the separateness of the devotee from the object of his devotion. This duality is most often represented as the separation of the lover (the bhakta) from his beloved (Śrī Kṛṣṇa).[1] The emphasis which the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas place on this duality, and the relationship which it inspires, is indicated by their doctrine that the main intention behind Kṛṣṇa's taking birth as Caitanya was his desire to experience the feeling of being a perfect devotee, as Rādhā had been for him in Vṛndāvana. The Vaiṣṇavas are therefore very insistent on the necessity of duality, of difference between the god-head and its manifestations in Creation, for one cannot devotedly love and serve that into which one is merged. Pilgrimage takes its place as the equal of many other ritual practices as an action which the loving devotee can undertake to try to create an intimate relationship across the gulf of duality.

g. Darśana, Prasāda and Pradakṣiṇa

Despite the philosophical differences between the traditions of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaiva-Śāktism, both traditions are part of the unified Hindu religious culture. This idea is given substance in the observation of certain important aspects of pilgrimage ritual shared by both traditions. The three terms to be discussed in this section identify features of popular Hindu practice common to all pilgrimage performances.

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[1]When Kṛṣṇa Kiśora Goswamy, an older priest of Navadvip, explained to me the love a bhakta feels for Kṛṣṇa, his eyes brimmed with tears as he tasted the rasa of his separation from Kṛṣṇa.

Darśana, from the root dṛis, is defined by Monier-Williams as "seeing, observing, looking, noticing, observation, perception." This definition is not exhaustive of the essence of darśana, however. Popular Hindu belief attaches merit to the mere sight of something or someone acknowledged as holy. To have the darśana of a saintly man, a temple, a holy river, an image of the deity, etc., is to acquire merit by virtue of simply having been in the presence of some form of the radiance of the holy. This concept is important in all Hindu pilgrimage traditions as a sufficient motive for a pilgrim's pilgrimage.

Prasāda is literally defined in its most common meaning as "a propitiatory gift, a gift in token of favour, a gift of food by a superior." The first two definitions capture the idea of reciprocity involved in the notion of prasāda: it is given in exchange. In temple ritual, prasāda is the term used to designate sacred food or other remains of offerings to the deity. When a bhoga (a food offering to the deity, which carries the notion of giving the deity enjoyment as well), flowers, fruit, etc., are offered in the temple, none is actually found to be consumed. But, having gone to the deity, the offering is sacralised by that contact. Food is believed to readily absorb the ritual status of the being who touches it, as commonly seen in the strict caste-based rules of commensality in India. To receive food touched by a superior is to receive something permeated by his higher status. It is thus an honour and meritorious to take food left over (uccisṭa) from the offerings to the deity. It is common in all types of Hindu pilgrimage to find pilgrims seeking to absorb the beneficial effects of contact with the deity through the consumption of sacralised food as prasāda.

The third term, pradakṣiṇa, identifies a ritual act practised in all temple-going among Hindus (as well as others). The word means "moving to

the right", and describes the action of circumambulation which is performed by worshippers as they circle the object of veneration -- temple, town, tank, lake, river, mountain, etc. -- in a clock-wise direction.

Although there are many other concepts and rites common to worship in all Hindu sub-traditions (e.g., prostration, the palms-touching greeting (praṇama), etc.) these three figure frequently in the pilgrimage practices as substantial aspects of pilgrim behaviour. They will recur in the ethnography that follows.

h. The Anti-pilgrimage Tradition in Hinduism

Within Hinduism, one finds several examples of anti-pilgrimage sentiment, in which pilgrimage is portrayed as an empty, external act that distracts from true spiritual endeavour. The critical attitude of Śaṅkara towards all rituals has already been mentioned. The poet-theologian Kabir has been quoted as saying:

> Benares is to the East, Mecca to the West; but explore your own heart, for there are both Rama and Allah.[1]

and

> Devotion, sacrifice and rosary, piety, pilgrimage, fasting and alms.
> Nine bhaktas, Vedas, the Book, all these are cloaks of falsehood.[2]

Similar to this is the lyric of a Bāul song:

> I would not go, my heart, to Mecca or Medina,
> For, behold, I ever abide by the side of my Friend.
> Mad would I become, had I dwelt afar, not knowing Him.
> There's no worship in Mosque or Temple or on special holy day.
> At every step I have my Mecca and Kāśī; sacred is every moment.[3]

The devotional lyrics of the Bengali Śākta poet Rāmprasād Sen contain

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[1] One Hundred Poems of Kabir, quoted in Ram Dass, Journey of Awakening, Bantam Books, New York, 1978, p.123.

[2] Bījak, Sabda 113, Ahmad Shah (trans.), the translator, Cawnpore, 1911.

[3] Quoted in K.M. Sen, Hinduism, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Mddx., 1961, p.105.

similar sentiments:

> What have I to do with Kāśī? The Lotus-Feet of Kālī are places of pilgrimage enough for me...The worshipper of Kālī laughs at the name of Gayā...

and

> What need for me to go to Kāśī? Upon the breast of Kāśī's maker {Śiva} is Kālī with her flowing locks.[1]

The primary importance of bhakti in Vaiṣṇavism has also given rise to criticism of pilgrimage as a means to spiritual development. The Bhāgavata-Māhātmya enjoins:

> in this world, not vows, not pilgrimages, not yoga practices, not sacrificial rites, not philosophical discourses; only devotion can give us freedom.[2]

The Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal express the same negative attitude to pilgrimage:

> "The Man of the house is dwelling in the house - in vain have you become mad by searching Him outside. It is for your own fault that you are roaming about for ever. You have been to Gayā, Benares (Kāśī), and Vṛndāvana, - and have travelled through many rivers and forests and other places of pilgrimage; but say, - have you seen in all these anything of Him of Whom you have heard? Through false illusion you have lost all your power of understanding,- with jewel tied in your own skirt, you have been swimming in search of it. With care you might have easily got the gem, - but you are losing everything carelessly, - the jewel shines so near to your eyes, but alas! you are keeping your eyes shut - and you do not see."
> (quoted in Das Gupta (1976:174)

Bharati (1963:143) says of the Ārya Samāj, a fundamentalist school of contemporary Hinduism, that it disallows "the practices of bathing at sacred places, pilgrimage, the use of beads and ascetic marks, and gifts to mendicants that were always part of the pilgrims' observances en route

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[1] Thompson and Spencer (trans.) 1923:40.

2 Quoted in S,. Radhakrishnan, The Brahma-Sūtra, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1960, p.167.

and on the spot." Swami Dayānanda, the founder of the Ārya Samāj, based his objection to these rituals on the fact that the Vedas do not mention them.[1] The principal objection to pilgrimage held by the Ārya Samāj is that the Purāṇas held out false shortcuts to liberation not revealed in the Vedas. The belief that one gains certain liberation if one dies in a holy river, for example, is presented in Ārya Samāj publications as an example of the kinds of practices it castigates. The Ārya Samāj holds this belief responsible for numerous suicides which it asserts have been fruitless.[2]

Despite these objections to pilgrimage, it remains an increasingly popular Hindu practice. The objections arise from isolated voices drawing upon strands of the Hindu tradition other than that including the pilgrimage tradition. The interest and involvement of the mass of Hindus in pilgrimage has been undampened by these objections.

This chapter has examined some important concepts of Bengali Hinduism, and the two main channels into which the regional religion runs. Pilgrimage has been placed within the larger scheme of Bengali religio-cultural traditions. We turn now to investigate the content and patterns of pilgrimage in West Bengal.

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[1] cf. R.C. Zaehner, Hinduism, O.U.P., London, 1966, pp.157-59.

[2] Bahadur Mal, Dayanand: A Study in Hinduism, Vishveshvaranand V.R. Institute, Hoshiarpur (Punjab), 1962, pp.28-31.

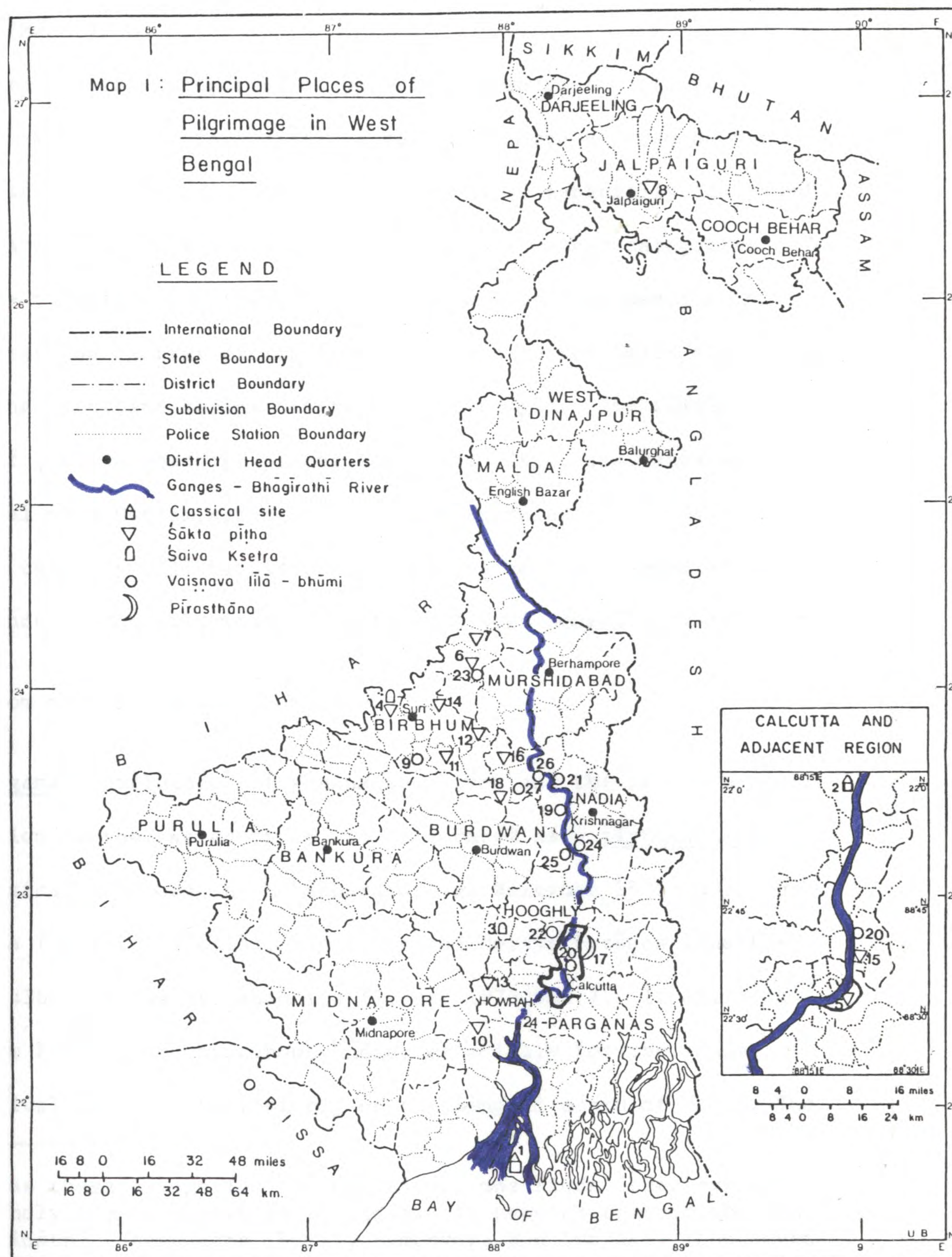
CHAPTER III

THE PILGRIMAGE TRADITION IN WEST BENGAL

The pilgrimage tradition in West Bengal is an expression of Bengali Hinduism. The religion and the pilgrimage tradition are not restricted to that state alone, however. The state boundary is a linguistic and cultural border, but it is permeable, and people and aspects of religious culture pass easily and frequently between Bengal and the rest of India.

Pilgrimage practice in West Bengal typically involves journeys to sacred places within the state. This is true of the great majority of pilgrimages undertaken by Bengali Hindus. Bengalis, however, do visit sacred places of pan-Hindu significance located in other states. Benares, Vṛndāvana, Dvārakā, Puri, Gayā, Hardwar, Rāmeśvara, and other renowned sacred places exert a strong pull on the devout Hindus of West Bengal. Bhardwaj (1973:219-20) and Jameson (1976:496) found many Bengali pilgrims at Hardwar in October. The Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal are enjoined to follow the preceptors of their cult, who travelled to Puri, Vṛndāvana, Dvārakā, Mathurā, Benares and South India (De 1961:90-102). And at Gayā, Vidyarthi found Bengalis among the more numerous pilgrim groups (1961:27, 92, 200).

But the location of these centres at distances of up to 1500 miles from West Bengal restricts the number of people who can afford the time and expense to undertake such journeys. Pilgrimages within West Bengal are much more accessible to the Bengali population and it is these which are commonly and frequently undertaken. A single day's journey will take



LEGEND

1. Gaṅgā - sāgara
2. Tribeni
3. Tarakeswar
4. Bakreswar
5. Kalighat
6. Tarapith
7. Nalhati
8. Jalpeswar
9. Joydev - Kenduli
10. Tamluk
11. Kankali
12. Labhpur
13. Rajabalahata
14. Nandekesvari
15. Daksineswar
16. Bahula
17. Kamdebpur
18. Khirgram
19. Navadvip / Mayapur
20. Kardah
21. Agradvip
22. Mahesh - Ballabhpur
23. Birchandrapur
24. Santipur
25. Ambika - Kalna
26. Katwa
27. Srikhanda

an individual from almost anywhere in the state to a regionally significant place of pilgrimage and home again. There are at least 45 such places in West Bengal (Map 1).

There are several categories of pilgrimage centre and pilgrimage in West Bengal. Those which fall within a category share a large number of characteristics with others in the same category -- especially deity and cult -- and are easily differentiated from those in other categories. Two categories -- pilgrimage centres deriving importance from mention in classical texts and centres exclusively dedicated to the deity Śiva -- each claim only one important shrine centre in West Bengal. The remaining three -- centres of goddess-worship, places sacred to Viṣṇu, and sites of the life or burial of a Muslim saint -- have many examples each. In this chapter each category will be discussed, and the central themes of the several strands of the pilgrimage tradition of West Bengal will be drawn out.[1]

a. Sites from the Classical Literature

The saṅgama (confluence) of the Ganges River and the Bay of Bengal, the termination of the sacred river, is celebrated as a tīrthasthāna in several classical sources: the Mahābhārata (van Buitenen 1975:380), the Garuḍa Purāṇa (Shastri 1968:15), the Kūrma and Matsya Purāṇas (Bhattacharyya 1976:36) and the Viṣṇusaṁhitā (Sircar 1973:66n.). It attracts pilgrims from Bengal and throughout India, especially for the annual bathing festival held on the last day of the Bengali month of Pauṣa. The

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[1]Besides these categories of holy sites, one finds other systems of grouping holy places elsewhere in India. It happens that of the four Dhāmas (Badrinātha, Jagannātha (Puri), Rāmeśvara and Dvārakā), the seven Mokṣapuris (i.e., holy cities where one gains liberation: Ayodhyā, Mathurā, Kāśī, Avantikā, Puri and Dvārātī), or the seven sacred Tīrthas (referring to the holy rivers Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Kāveri, Godāvarī and Sindhu) none falls within West Bengal.

actual site of pilgrimage is located on Sagara Island, in the south of 24 Parganas District, accessible only by boat. Here, at the āśrama (monastic refuge) of Kapila, the legendary saint of the Vedic period and founder of the Sāṁkhya philosophy (Bhattacharyya 1976:29),[1] pilgrims gather to bathe in the holy waters at the particularly auspicious moment of the saṅkrānti (last day of the month). Bathing cleanses, bathing in the Ganges cleanses especially, and the most effective way of eliminating the effects of sin is to bathe in the Ganges on an auspicious day. While pilgrims and religious seekers (sādhus and sannyāsis) journey to Gaṅgā-sāgara at Pauṣa saṅkrānti primarily for religious reasons, the festival is also attended by a large fair. The pilgrimage thus becomes a stage for all manner of social interaction:

> Family men come here with devotion in their heart, sadhus come with a burning desire for moksha {spiritual liberation}, singers, story-tellers, and artists come to entertain. Traders come with their wares. Even prostitutes and gamblers also crowd the place along with the blind, crippled and invalid beggars...Politicians come here with the intention to mix freely with commoners, to earn popularity, social service workers come forward to help and anti-socials come to snatch valuables. Something like a cross-section of the entire society assembles here, in which you can notice the force and weakness, beauty and vulgarity.
>
> (Bhattacharyya 1976:49)

The holiness of Gaṅgā-sāgara derives from its position as the termination point of the Ganges River. The Śākta, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava cults have all sought to include this sacred place within their own corpus of sites. It is listed as a Śākta pīṭha in the Bṛhan-Nīlatantra and the Pranatosani Tantra (Sircar 1973:84) and as one of the sixty-eight sacred svāyambhuvaliṅgas in India, sacred shrines of Śiva (Gopinatha Rao 1968:85).

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[1]The Sāṁkhya Aphorisms are the basis of one of the six systems of Indian philosophy; cf. J.R. Ballantyne, The Sāṁkhya Aphorisms of Kapila, Vol.XXXIV, The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies, Varanasi, 1963.

The Śrī Nārada-pañca-rātnam, an ancient Vaiṣṇava text, states that "death at the confluence of the Ganges and Ocean is the cause of Nirvana", that is, the state of highest truth and tranquility (Vijnanananda 1974:111). Though claimed by all three cults, Gaṅgā-sāgara-saṅgama belongs to none. It remains an important sacred place and a much-visited place of pilgrimage to all sections of the Hindu population, from Bengal and elsewhere in India.

Besides Gaṅgā-sāgara, only Tribeni, located within Bansberia town in Hooghly District, has a claim to antiquity.[1] Its name -- tri (three) veṇi (Bengali: beṇi) (braids) -- derives from its location at the confluence of three rivers: the Ganges (here called the Bhāgīrathī), the Jamunā and the Sarasvatī. Tribeni is considered a place of great sanctity as the counterpart of one of the holiest places of pilgrimage in India -- the confluence of these same three rivers at Prayāga, in Allahabad, to which local residents claim it is connected by an underground tunnel.[2] Since the Sarasvatī is no longer visible at Prayāga, but is at Tribeni, priests at Tribeni drew the distinction between the former as Yuktaveṇi (closed braid) and the latter as Muktaveṇi (open braid). Tribeni was also once a great seat of Sanskrit learning, but is now in decline. At the present time, the principal attraction of Tribeni is the sacred Ganges River, as is reflected in its annual festival calendar, which celebrates every saṇkrānti (auspicious for a bath in the Ganges), the festival of Varuṇa, the god of water, held in Caitra month (March-April), and the celebration of Daśaharā in Āṣāḍha month (June-July) in honour of

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[1] cf. Benoy Ghosh (1957:83) where the first written reference to Tribeni is said to date from the 11th century; also von Glasenapp (1928:118).

[2] See Bharati (1963:165) for a similar story of the linking of a lesser place of pilgrimage to a greater one by tunnel, whereby the lesser place claims a share in the glory of the greater.

the Ganges (Banerji 1972:726-29). Although the Kubjikā Tantra claims Tribeni as a siddha-pīṭha (infra p.83) of the goddess (Sircar 1973:19), this designation has little discernible impact on the current status of Tribeni as a place of pilgrimage.

b. The Śākta Pīṭhas

The personification of the forces of the universe into anthropomorphic deities in the Hindu tradition involves both convergence into supreme deities and the splintering of these into a myriad of lesser deities. The supreme female deity, who represents the energy of the universe as well as the Mother goddess, is Śakti. In her unified aspect, Śakti is formless, featureless and boundless. But as the local village goddess (gram-devatā), and in her various aspects as Kālī, Umā, Pārvatī, Tārā, Sarasvatī, Girija, Durgā and so on, she takes a form, a character and a limited range of power.

The mythology of the goddess presents two opposing poles of her character: timeless expanse and local familiar manifestation. The goddess is beyond time, yet she is the guardian of life and death and so participates in the time-bound world. As the energy (śakti) of the universe, she exists beyond the limitations of space, but, having taken forms as the goddesses, she participates in space. Her involvement in time creates the on-going reality of the universe, and in space the perceptible features which make it up, and thus the timeless, unknowable, unreachable goddess is made accessible to limited man. Each female divinity represents a rūpa, or appearance, of the mūla-śakti, the original, unmanifest goddess. Woodroffe (1963:14) explains the ontological status of these various aspects of the goddess:

> The Devī, as Para-Brahman, is beyond all form and guṇa {quality}. The forms of the Mother of the Universe are three-fold. There is first the Supreme (para) form, of which, as the Viṣnu-yāmala says, 'none know'. There is next her subtle (Sūkṣma) form, which consists of mantra. But as the mind cannot easily settle itself upon that which is formless, She appears as the subject of contemplation in Her third, or gross (Sthūla), or physical form, with hands and feet and the like as celebrated in the Devī-stotra of the Purānas and Tantras.

These distinctions have bearing on the most sacred places of goddess-worship -- the Śākta pīṭhas.[1]

The Śākta pīṭhas are the sacred seats of the goddess (pīṭha = seat). In these places of pilgrimage, the goddess is believed to be manifest, and thus not only is the formless goddess brought within the range of human perception in her various manifestations, there also exist actual places where she is believed to be resident. These are centres where the sacredness of the goddess takes its most intense form, yet where the goddess can be approached personally.

A myth links most of the Śākta pīṭhas within a schema of unity. Sircar (1973:3-7) seeks to trace the kernel of the myth to the Ṛg-Veda. It appears in its most developed form in the Mahābhārata (XII, chapters 282-83) and the Brahma Purāṇa (chapter 39). The legend was expanded and altered into variants in various Tantras, the Kālikā Purāṇa (Beane 1976:200) and two important works on the Śākta pīṭhas -- the Pīṭha-nirṇaya, and Mahāpīṭhanirūpaṇa (Sircar 1973:80).

The legend concerns the goddess Satī, daughter of Dakṣa[2] and wife of Śiva. Dakṣa decided to hold a great sacrifice (yajña) to which he invited neither his daughter nor son-in-law. Satī was offended by this slight and attended the sacrifice uninvited. There she was insulted by

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[1]Śakti is a proper noun referring to the goddess and encompassing all of her manifestations; Śākta is an adjective indicating reference to Śakti. As a noun, Śākta refers to a devotee of the goddess.

[2]For further discussion of the complex character of Dakṣa see J.B. Long, "Dakṣa: Divine Embodiment of Creative Skill", History of Religions, Vol.17, No.1 (1977), pp.29-60.

Dakṣa and, humiliated, she took her life. On hearing this news, Śiva hastened to the house of Dakṣa, destroyed the _yajña_, killed Dakṣa and claimed the body of his wife. Inconsolable at his loss, he placed Satī's body on his shoulder and began a mad dance through the three universes. His dance threatened to destroy all Creation. The gods became distraught at this prospect. One version of the story of Dakṣa-_yajña_ has it that the gods approached Viṣṇu to restrain Śiva. Viṣṇu sent arrows or his _Sudarśanacakra_ (discus) to dismember the body of Satī limb by limb. An alternative version states that the deities Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śani entered Satī's body and caused it to disintegrate. When Śiva was thereby deprived of Satī's body, he ceased his mad dance. The parts of Satī's body fell from Śiva's shoulder to the earth, and the places where they landed became the sacred Śākta _pīṭhas_.

The lists of the Śākta _pīṭhas_ which accompany the various versions of the legend overlap but do not coincide. Some list only four _pīṭhas_, most fifty-one and some 108. Sircar has indexed all of the names given in fifteen works, and has tried to identify the actual locations of the _pīṭhas_. These range from Kāmākhya in Assam, where the goddess is Kāmarūpa and where Satī's generative organ, the _yoni_, fell, and Kancipuram in the southern state of Tamil Nadu to Hiṅgulā in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan. Here Satī's navel fell. Significantly, some lists include entries that are not literal place names. The Devī-Bhāgavata (VII.30) lists "strength in living beings", "Pārvatī in the company of Śiva", and Gāyatrī {mantra} in grammar" among the 108 _pīṭhas_ (Sircar 1973:28). There are a large number of listings for what is now West Bengal. One reason for this is the strength of the cult of the goddess in this region, but another is the tendency of Bengali writers, such as Mukundarāma, the sixteenth century Bengali poet, to elevate unimportant rural temples of

the goddess to the status of one of the 108 pīṭhas "merely because the poet was originally an inhabitant of the village of Damunya in the Burdwan District" (Sircar 1973:34).

The Śākta pīṭhas listed in Sircar's index as located in West Bengal are given below. Those which remain active places of pilgrimage today are marked with an asterisk (*):

Ambikā - may be Ambikā-Kālnā in the Burdwan District

Aṭṭahāsa*- located near Labhpur in the Birbhum District

Bahulā* - near Katwa in Burdwan District

Bāliḍāṅgā - Hooghly District

Bhadreśvara - possibly Bhadreswar, Hooghly District

Gaṅgāsāgara* - where the Bhāgīrathī enters the Bay of Bengal

Gauḍa, Rāḍha - the region of Bengal or part of it

Japyeśvara - probably the same as Jalpeśvara in Jalpaiguri District

Kālīghāta* - in Calcutta (also Kālīpīṭha) [1]

Kāñcī - possibly on the Kopāi in Birbhum District

Kṣīragrāma, Kṣīrapura, Kṣīrikā - Khirgram near Katwa, Burdwan District[2]

Maṅgalakoṭa, Maṅgalakoṭara - at the junction of the Ajay and Kunur in Burdwan District

Nalāhāṭī* - in Birbhum District

Nandipura* - near Sainthia, Birbhum District

Pradyumna - probably Pandua, Hooghly District

Rājabolahāṭa - near Serampore, Hooghly District

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[1]See Surajit Sinha, 'Kali Temple at Kalighat and the City of Calcutta' in Surajit Sinha (ed.), Cultural Profile of Calcutta, The Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1972.

[2]cf. Ghosh 1957:185-86.

Tamolipta* - Tamluk, Midnapore[1]

Tārā* - identified with Tarapur (Tārāpīṭha), Birbhum

Triveṇī* - Hooghly District

Ujānī - Kogram, Burdwan District

Vakreśvara, Vakranātha* - modern Bakreswar, Birbhum

Vardhamāna - possibly Burdwan

Vibhāsa - near Tamluk, Midnapore

Not all of these places are identifiable with certainty. Some name a river or a region. Others are temples which are no longer existent. Still others have waned in importance and are seldom visited, or are active only at the time of their annual festival. Even in the classical texts a distinction is made between 'great seats' of the goddess (mahā-pīṭha) and lesser seats (upā-pīṭha) (Sircar 1973:39-40) to distinguish important temples of the goddess from the unimportant.

The cult of Śakti is related to that of Śiva, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. This association is represented in every Śākta pīṭha by the presence of a bhairava,[2] a named manifestation of Śiva, as the associate of the particular aspect of the goddess found in that place. The union of Śiva and Śakti, often conceived symbolically as a wedded couple, is represented in every Śākta pīṭha by having Śiva installed as a liṅga in a small shrine near to that of the goddess. There he receives oblations from priests and pilgrims, but he is always accorded secondary status to the goddess.

Not all of the ancient places of the goddesses mentioned in lists of pīṭhas are today active places of pilgrimage. Conversely, not all present-tīrthas to Śakti are enumerated among the Śākta pīṭhas. Although the Dakṣa-

[1]See P.K. Maity, The Goddess Bargabhima, Punthi Pushtak, Calcutta, 1971.

[2]frightful, terrible, horrible, formidable (Monier-Williams).

yajña legend and the accompanying lists of *pīṭhas* establish which are the recognised *pīṭhas*, other temples of the goddess have more recently come into ascendancy. The temple of Daksineswar, just north of Calcutta, for example, was built in the 19th century and is now a well-visited place of pilgrimage due to the fame of the renowned Bengali saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who presided there and for whom the *devī* (goddess) of the temple was a living manifest being. Other accepted *pīṭhas*, such as Kankali (Kāñcī), Rājabolahāṭa and Bālidāṅga are presently much less visited by pilgrims.

At each of the Śākta *pīṭhas*, imagery and symbolism of the goddess are exhibited to the pilgrims. Her various aspects, classified by Beane as aqualithic (oriented to water), therio-affinal (associated with animals) and vegetal (associated with vegetation) (1977:48-61), are expressed in different symbolic ways. Every *pīṭha*, as most *tīrthas*, is located on water, if only a man-made tank. Great powers are attributed to these sacred waters of the goddess.[1] The true statuary image of the goddess at Kankali, near Bolpur, is believed to reside in the small pond behind the temple. It is said at Rājabolahāṭa that the deity bathes in the temple tank on Saturday (which, along with Tuesday, is a holy day of the week for the goddess) and so to bathe on Sunday is especially efficacious as the tank water is most potently infused with the energy of the goddess soon after her bath. It is therefore claimed that one who bathes on three successive Sundays will be cured of any ailment. The temple at Bakreswar is located at the site of natural mineral hot springs which are credited with curative properties according to legend and to scientific tests conducted by the West Bengal government (which has built a tourist lodge there).

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[1] See discussion below (p. 84) on the regenerative powers of the goddess, as these relate to water.

The vegetal aspects of the goddess are seen most commonly in the large trees which are located at many Śākta pīṭhas. The temple of Nandekeśvari, near Sainthia in Birbhum District, is a small, cagelike room set in the limbs of a huge banyan tree. The Śākta pīṭha of Phulera near Labhpur is set in a grove of trees. Trees fill the courtyard of the Nalāhāṭī temple. Trees themselves become objects of veneration because of their symbolic identification with the goddess as earth-mother. The sādhus whom I interviewed at Tarapith sit under the trees in a forest hoping to find the now-lost seat where the sage Vaśiṣṭha achieved his realisation. The seat is believed to be beneath a śimul[1] tree. One such tree, believed by a sādhu to be the true tree, is regularly daubed with vermilion in the manner in which the goddess is honoured. A well-known sādhu of Bakreswar has surrounded a tree with human skulls and bones, part of his Tantric ritual paraphernalia. Bharati (1963:150) states that pilgrims to the Daksineswar temple are not simply visiting the site of Ramakrishna's dwelling, but that it is the five 'pippal' trees (ficus Indica religiosa), the "pañcabati which attracts the pilgrims."

The various goddesses in the Śākta pīṭhas have their vāhanas (animal companions). Durgā has the lion, Sarasvatī the swan, Lakṣmi the owl, Gaṅgā a fish, Śītalā an ass, etc. Animal sacrifices and the fondness of jackals and tigers for the places of the fierce aspects of the goddess further associate Devī with animals in the minds of devotees.

The goddess in the Śākta pīṭha does not always take an anthropomorphic form. The images at Labhpur and Nandekesvari, and also at the non-pīṭha goddess temples of Āgameśvari and Poramā in Navadvip, are not human-like. The former two images are large rocks embedded in the floor of the temple,

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[1] Salmalia malabarica; Sanskrit śālmali: the silk-cotton tree.

decorated with wide eyes and smeared with red colour.[1] The visual impression of these images is of something animate, as indicated by the eyes, but still something with an undifferentiated form. One interpretation of this imagery is that it expresses the bipolar concepts of the goddess as both formless and with form. This idea is most clearly represented at Tarapith where the goddess of the temple is a rough, uncarved stone stored inside a hollow conventional anthropomorphic image of Tārā. At the two Navadvip temples, the goddess is worshipped in the form of a simple clay pot (ghaṭa) with a coconut on top. The great goddess, who exists outside form but also with form and in many forms, is presented to devotees via the full set of Śākta pīṭhas as both individually manifested (as the particular deity of any one shrine), and as the unified goddess (who is always Śakti, despite numerous forms, anthropomorphic and otherwise).

The system of Śākta pīṭhas can be analysed from several perspectives. From a cultic point of view, a myth which unites the diverse and dispersed temples of the various goddesses strengthens the unity and organisation of the Śākta cult. The unity is expressed in the concept of each Śākta pīṭha sharing in the body of Satī. This view implies that the Śākta pīṭhas existed as religious centres before being organised into a 'body' of centres by propagators of the Śākta cult. Eliade (1969:347) suggests that the centres which qualified to be included in the group of pīṭhas "had acquired their rank as holy places from the fact that yogins and ascetics had meditated and obtained siddhis {powers} there." One can only speculate as to the origin of each pīṭha but an association between ascetics and the founding of the shrine can be noted in several narratives of origin of Śākta pīṭhas which were collected in West Bengal. Nalāhāṭī pīṭha is said to have been

[1]Kālijai, a goddess to be found in a shrine on Chilka Lake in Orissa "is represented by an irregular block of stone...besmeared with pasty oil and vermilion" (Beane 1977:49).

discovered when a Brāhmaṇ had a vision that the oesophagus of the goddess had fallen there. The head priest at Labhpur said that a daśanāmi sannyāsi from Benares revealed that the lip of Satī had fallen to earth at that spot. The goddess is believed to have come to Tarapith because of the sādhanā of Vaśiṣṭha, an ancient legendary saint, and more recently of Vāmākhepā, a 20th century sādhu. Bakreswar bears the name of the ascetic Aṣṭāvakra who achieved enlightenment by austerities at that pīṭha. It is likely that centres came to be included in the group of pīṭhas because of a pre-existing eminence which cult propagators, such as the authors of works on the Śākta pīṭhas, sought to tap for the benefit of the cult as a whole.

The mythology of the goddess associates her with both the forces of creation and of destruction in the universe. These opposed characteristics are to be seen in the Śākta pīṭhas as well. As a group, the system of pīṭhas can be seen to be an earthly representation of the body of the dead goddess, of which each pīṭha claims a part. Out of the self-destructive action of Devī have emerged the centres of the cult. The full configuration of these centres represents not only the goddess as a body, but also the Śākta cult in all its vitality. Similarly, in each individual pīṭha, the ground has been sanctified and energised by the touch of the flesh of the goddess. This power is the source of the creative, protective, regenerative potentiality of the Śākta pīṭha, yet it is born of contact with the goddess's corpse.

Those pīṭhas considered particularly effective for the acquisition of spiritual power (siddhi: literally 'success') are called siddha-pīṭhas. The Kubjikā Tantra, quoted by Sircar (1973:19), lists forty-two such sacred places. In West Bengal at the present time Tarapith and Bakreswar are widely reputed as siddhi-yielding sites. Beliefs regarding these places

emphasise the ability of the goddess to yield spiritual enlightenment and the fruits thereof: wisdom, bliss, eternal life.

Two examples will demonstrate the regenerative powers of the goddess. The myth of the origin of the pīṭha at Rājabolahāṭa, Hooghly District, tells that the deity destroyed the ships of a merchant who made improper advances to her, but restored them when he acknowledged her as Devī. Another myth, shared by several Śākta pīṭhas, relates how the sacred water associated with the temple of the goddess can restore life. At Tamluk, dead fish are seen to be revived by having water from the deity's tank sprinkled over them (Maity 1971:1-2). And at Tarapith sailors observed that a fish which had been cut up in preparation for cooking reformed itself into a whole fish when washed in the tank of the goddess. The dead son of a merchant, when dipped into the same tank, was restored to life.[1]

The life-giving, protective, creative capacities of the goddess provide the motives for most pilgrims' visits to Śākta pīṭhas, where they seek out the powerful Mother to aid them in this life or for help in procuring a better future life. The goddess is sought out for all the spiritual, material and physical needs of her children. In this role, the goddess is creator and provider, and it is this aspect of the goddess that most pilgrims seek to propitiate or benefit from in their worship.

But this same life-giving, life-enriching, life-protecting Mother-goddess is simultaneously the fierce, blood-thirsty Reaper. The description of Kālī by the poet Bhāratchandra Ray (1712-60) in his Vidyā-Sundara is typical of this aspect of the goddess:

> amidst them all, the goddess -- her long and matted hair flowing wildly, she laughed her long maddened laughter, her third eye scarlet, moving like a disc in her head, her greedy tongue pro-

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[1] See Chapter V for this story.

> truding long and loose; she shone with brightness more vertiginous than the sun or fire; she ground her huge hard teeth, her lips drawn back, and streams of blood ran down from her lips' sides; corpses of children swung as earrings from her ears, and on her breast there hung a string of severed heads, with wild and awful faces. Her garland was the intestine of the demon, her girdle one of demons, her ornaments of bones. In lust for blood and flesh the jackals circled round her, and the earth trembled with their howling. She trampled heaven, earth, and hell, crushed them beneath her feet, preventing the cosmic dissolution...
>
> (Dimock (trans.) 1963:128-29)

She is horrifying, fierce and destructive, yet it is she who is "preventing the cosmic dissolution."

The fierce goddess also has her counterpart in benign manifestations. Fierce Kālī is linked with succouring Bhadrakālī. Similarly the fearsome Tripura is opposed to but associated with the gentle Sundari. Mythologically, the nurturant aspect of the goddess can be noted in Pārvatī, Lakṣmi and Sarasvatī, who are all portrayed as dutiful consorts of male gods. One myth which will be important to the discussions of fierce Tārā in Chapter VI recounts how Devī gave her breast to Śiva to relieve the burning in his throat caused by his swallowing the hālāhala poison that threatened the world.

In her most encompassing form, the goddess is the active principle of the universe. She is the counterpart of passive Śiva, and as such is the very principle of life. But life has its inherent complement in death, and the goddess, giver of life, is also mistress of death by the inevitable association of the two. In myth, she links life and death within herself, as complementary opposites, just as they are inseparably linked in the organic processes of the animate universe. We will see that the relationship of life to death, in myth and in fact, is symbolically expressed in the structure of ritual and behaviour in the Śākta pīṭhas.[1]

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[1]Turner, in his article "Death and the Dead in the Pilgrimage Process" (1976), suggests that the association of pilgrimage centres with death derives from the nature of pilgrimage as a rite of passage. This notion is questionable, for reasons which will be discussed in the critique of Turner's work in Chapter VIII.

Before the temple to the goddess in every Śākta _pīṭha_ stands the two-pronged fork (_yūpa-kāṣṭa_) for securing the heads of animals being sacrificed. In the moderately and very active _pīṭhas_ at least one goat would be sacrificed daily, and several hundreds of them as well as buffalos on festival days. Pilgrims passing the place of sacrifice dip a finger in the blood and touch it to their lips and foreheads. When a sacrifice has not recently taken place, they put a few grains of sand from the sacrificing pit in their mouths. Pilgrims place a flower or stick of incense on the sacrificing forks and prostrate to that place. Thus, even if no actual deaths (i.e., animal sacrifices) are taking place, death is still symbolically represented in the temple of the _pīṭha_ by the _yūpa-kāṣṭa_, a fact acknowledged in the pilgrims' behaviour.

But an even more powerful image of death in some Śākta _pīṭhas_ is the close association of the temple of the goddess with cremation grounds. Bakreswar, Tarapith and Kankali are _pīṭhas_ in West Bengal having _śmaśānas_ (cremation grounds) immediately adjacent to the temple. Pilgrims visit the _śmaśāna_ as part of their _darśana_ of the _pīṭha_ and are quite likely to find a cremation or burial in progress, as these sacred places are preferred cremation sites and are much used for this purpose. The cremation ground will also be dotted with the _samādhis_ (memorial shrines) of _sādhakas_ who have died and been buried there. These _samādhis_ stand as a further representation of death in the _pīṭha_.

The significance of death imagery in Śākta and Tantric practice derives form a doctrinal emphasis on the individual's realisation of his own mortality and the transience of all material things. By confronting death, the seeker attains insight into the true nature of existence and realises that his place in a recurrent cycle of birth and death has come about because of attachment to illusion. Bose and Haldar (1956 :76-77)

explain:

> the very consciousness that everything is subject to death and decay fills one's heart with feelings of Vairagya or non-attachment, if not of detachment proper. We then readily realise the vanity of our desires and world attachments and do then also realise that our attachments are vain and will cause us disappointment and sorrow. Hence, there grows instinctively a yearning to be above all attachments.

This idea is given ritual and iconographic expression in the pīṭhas. The mūrti of the fierce goddess usually depicts her holding a severed head and garlanded with a necklace of skulls. Sādhakas seeking to tap the creative spiritual power of the goddess frequently seat themselves on or near five human skills (pañca-muṇḍi-āsana), preferably in a cremation ground. Meditation while seated on a recently dead human corpse is also practised, as is animal sacrifice. Through these and associated means, seekers after the goals of Tantric practice attain insight into the cycle of birth and death, creation and destruction, of which they are a part and from which they hope to free themselves by learning to discriminate the real from the illusory.

Beane (1977:206) overstates the case by suggesting that spiritual gains are the goal of all visitors to the Śākta pīṭhas. This is true of the minority. Spiritual seeking is but one of several reasons for which the goddess is approached in the pīṭha. Health, procreation, longevity, protection from danger, personal regeneration as well as enlightenment are the fruits of the goddess' creative ability sought by pilgrims to her holy shrines. Not all Śākta pīṭhas are considered siddha pīṭhas, and it is the latter in particular that are sought out by sādhakas.

The pilgrim approaches the goddess in the pīṭha in her aspect as the merciful mother who will care for him in his life, who will grant the boon of her power and protection. But he sees there that the stuff of life,

its energy and blood, if yielded by the goddess, can equally be retracted by her. If she grants life and its fruits, she is sure to send death and ashes as well. This duality is expressed in a salutation to the goddess of pox, Śītalā, in a manner which is applicable to all aspects of Devī:

> Whomsoever you look at, Mother, from the corner of your right eye, attains paradise merely at the hint. Whoever you look at with your left eye loses existence, and no one remains to light the lamp of his lineage.
> (quoted from the "Salutation to Śītalā" in Nicholas 1977:16)

The Śākta pīṭhas are therefore places of interaction and communication between the human and divine, where one approaches the deity. They are also a sui generis system of signification. The very layout of the pīṭhas combined with common practices performed there expresses symbolically various characteristics of the goddess, especially with respect to her cosmic opposites. These messages are conveyed to the pilgrim simply by his participation in the meaningfully structured environment of the Śākta pīṭhas. The pīṭhas are places of pilgrimage, but also take their place along with songs, poems, devotional literature and drama as an idiom for the popular expression of the symbolism and character of the goddess.

To understand the pīṭhas within their system of sacred locations, and these within the greater realm of the Cosmic goddess, it is useful to think of each level reproducing and encompassing those below it on a scale of increasing abstraction and rarification. In each pīṭha the goddess is expressed in a certain form, space, time and character. This is her most limited level. At the next level, the full system of pīṭhas, representing the dead body of Satī and the living cult of the goddess, contains within it the goddess in a multitude of forms, spaces, times and characters. Still configured on the earth, this is the goddess in multiplicity, but tied most prominently to space (geography). To move to the next level of symbolisation,

we must add to the geographical pīṭhas those things which some literary lists of pīṭhas include but which are not places, such as the Gāyatrī mantra in grammar, light in the solar orb, strength in living beings, and so on (Sircar 1973:28), and also aspects of the mind of the goddess (ibid:35). Taking all these features together, a pīṭha seems to be a place where some aspect of Śakti is believed to be present, where her presence is expressed in some form, where she is accessible, and so able to yield her boons, and where the aspects of her character, including her cosmic aspects, are made manifest to the devotee. The essential features of these traits are applicable to certain non-geographical entities as well as sacred places of pilgrimage. That Śakti is believed to reside in the sacred Gāyatrī mantra, for example, that this is a limited form of her cosmic being, that the recitation of this mantra yields the fruit of devotion to Śakti and that she is accessible through it, qualifies this creation to be categorised as a 'seat' of the goddess. When these types of pīṭhas are added to the geographical kind, the full category of Śākta pīṭhas is defined by the relationship of these limited aspects of Śakti to the more fixed aspects below and the more formless, abstract notions above. Pīṭhas, on this level, concern the goddess in a multitude of forms (including Devīs, grammar, light, strength, etc.), places (geographical as well as conceptual), in time (but not in a limited sense, in that notions like strength and light are timebound concepts) and characters. A pīṭha in this category is, most fundamentally, a place where one can find the goddess, and so the category includes concepts as well as temples.

On the most refined level we have the goddess without form, and yet with the capacity to take form; without time, and yet with control over it; without space and yet with the power of the universe (which by implication exists); and without character yet manifest in many characters.

We began by noting the tendency of Hinduism to represent its deities as both converging into supreme deities and splintering these into a myriad of lesser deities. The paradox in thought which makes this concept even more complex is the belief that even at the most lowly, form-bound level, the goddess is simultaneously her cosmic, formess self, and that in the cosmic, characterless aspect, she is still Durgā, Kālī, Tārā, Umā and the rest. Each exists within the other despite their differences of ontological type. The _pīṭhas_ can best be understood in two ways, each reflecting one of these types. For a study of pilgrimage, the _pīṭhas_ are temples to the goddess, scattered throughout the Indian sub-continent and visited by pilgrims. But as pilgrimage is an institution which is part of the larger religious culture, which it reflects, the _pīṭhas_ also have their own meaning as vehicles for the expression of the reality of the goddess. They are thus geographical places as well as multivalent symbols, simultaneously temples for _pūjā_ and also aspects of the ideological system associated with Śakti and the Śākta cult.

c. The Śaiva _Kṣetras_

Śiva is believed to be present, manifest and hence accessible in his temples. As a deity who is commonly believed to hold responsibility for the protection of his devotees, and as the ascetic _par excellence_, the many centres throughout India devoted to Śiva are busy refuges for pilgrims of many types. Bhardwaj, in his study of the geography of Hindu pilgrimage, states: "Among the many deities associated with sacred places on an all-India scale, Śiva...occupies the dominant position..." (1973:225). In Bengal, however, there are far fewer Śaivite than Vaiṣṇava and Śākta centres. Śiva is an important deity, and his principal sacred place in West Bengal is the busiest pilgrimage centre in the state, but the small

number of Śaivite centres reflects the ascendancy of the Śakti aspect of the Śiva-Śakti duo in Bengal.

Unlike the Śākta pīṭhas, the holiest centres for the worship of Śiva in India do not include within their numbers a site within West Bengal. Like the Śākta, the Śaivite tradition recognises a unity among its holiest sites throughout India. These number variously five, twelve or sixty-eight, as we shall see. The principal shrine of Śiva in West Bengal -- Tarakeswar -- which is the most visited place of pilgrimage in the state, is not among these, although it does associate itself with and tap the power of one of the most important recognised Śaivite centres by various symbolic and associative means.

Śiva is worshipped in both an anthropomorphic and an ithyphallic form usually as the stylised liṅga. There are several legends about the origin of liṅga worship. Walker (1968:595) gives three different stories which are told as explanations for the worship of the phallus:

> One story has it that Śiva mourning for his immolated wife Sati, was taunted by the beautiful young wife of a sage and ravished her. Her husband cursed the god to be worshipped not in his own form but in the shape of the instrument of his violence and shame. Another, that Śiva wandering disconsolate in the nude state mourning for his wife in the forest of Daruvana, was seen by the wives of certain sages who were aroused at the sight and desired to unite with him. The sages cursed the god's liṅga to fall off. As it touched the earth it grew to immense size like a great shining column. Brahmā and Vishṇu saw it when its top had reached upwards beyond the clouds and its lower end was buried deep in the earth. They decided to investigate. Taking the form of a boar Vishṇu dived into the depths of the primeval ocean to reach the base of the column, and Brahmā taking the form of a swan flew up to reach its top. When they returned Vishṇu confessed that he could not find its foundations, while Brahmā boasted that he had reached the summit. At this moment Śiva appeared, denounced Brahmā as a liar, praised Vishṇu for his honesty, and declared that the column could not be measured because it was in fact his liṅga. At the request of Vishṇu he left part of his liṅga in its tejas (fire) form on the Aruṇāchala hill. Other legends state that because Śiva once inadvertently had intercourse with his spouse on ground consecrated to the sages; or because he kept the sage Bhṛigu waiting while he completed the act; or because he once performed the sexual act in the presence of Brahmā, Vishṇu and Vaśiṣṭha, he castrated himself from shame and ordained that the organ of his lust should henceforth be worshipped.

Other authors seek to place the origins of linga-worship in a non-Aryan fertility cult which was absorbed by the Aryan Hindus into their cult of Rudra-Śiva in the post-Vedic period (Marshall 1931:48ff.).[1] Linga-worship was prominent in the period of the Mahābhārata (Bhandarkar 1913:114), although the practice is castigated in the Vedas (Ṛg Veda VII:21,5; X:99,3). The worship of the phallic image is celebrated in the Śiva and Linga Purāṇas and the Nandi Upā-purāṇa.

The source of the most important system of categorising the Śaivite places of pilgrimage is the Śiva Purāṇa (Jñāna-saṁhitā). In this work (Adh XXXVIII, sls.17-20), an exhaustive account of the twelve 'effulgent phalluses', the jyotirlingas,[2] and their respective 'lesser phalluses' (upā-lingas), is given. Śiva says: "I am omnipresent, but I am especially in twelve forms and places" (quoted in Dowson 1961:177-78).[3] These sites are located across the breadth of India, from the southern tip at Rāmeśvara to the Himalayas, from Bihar to Gujerat. The jyotirlingas are undisputed holy places of Śiva, but the list is not exhaustive, as indicated by the existence of two additional systems of classification of the sacred places

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[1] N. Gangadharan, in "The Linga - Origin of its Concept and Worship," Purāṇa, 20, 1, 1978, 87-92, makes a case for a non-phallic interpretation of linga-worship.

[2] See also the Koṭirudrasaṁhitā, Chapter 1, "The Greatness of the Jyotirlingas and their Upālingas" in the Śiva Purāṇa.

[3] The twelve sites listed in the Śiva Purāna are Somanātha in Saurāṣṭra (cf. K.M. Munshi, Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1965); Mallikārjuna on the Śrīśaila (cf. S. Udayalinga Rao, Holy Srisailam, Bala Saraswati Book Depot, Kurnool, Madras, 1973); Mahākāla at Ujjayini; Oṁkāra at Amareśvara (on the Narmada River); Kedāra in the Himalayas; Bhīma-śankara at Dākinī near Poona; Viśveśvara at Vārānasi; Tryambaka on the Godavari nr. Nasik; Vaidyanātha near Deogarth, Bihar; Nāgeśa at Dārukāvana (Aundh?); Rāmeś-vara at Setubandha; Ghṛṣṇeśa (Ghuśrīnesa, Ghuśmeśa) at Śivālaya (Ellora near Daulatabad). Other lists of the twelve jyotirlingas disagree somewhat, omitting the twelfth name listed above and including instead either Kaitabeśvara (at Hardwar) or Gautameśa (no location given in Dowson (1961:178)); cf. Walker (1968:596) and Crooke (1956:25).

of Śiva.[1]

The longest list of sites especially sacred to Śiva is that of the svāyambhuvaliṅgas or svayambhūliṅgas, as described in the Kāmikāgama. These temples containing phallic representations of Śiva are revered because their liṅgas are believed to have risen up by themselves, having come into existence autochthonously in the primordial past. They are thus not thought of as the creations of man. In the commentary by Nigama-jñānadēva on his Jirṇōddhāra-daśakam, sixty-eight sites of svāyambhuva-liṅgas are listed.[2]

The third system of organisation of liṅga shrines concerns only five South Indian Śiva temples which are said to house bhūtaliṅgas (elemental phalluses). In these, Śiva is believed to manifest himself as a liṅga of a natural element: earth, water, air, ether and fire.[3] This system of shrines takes on a symbolic significance when one notes that Śiva as the great god manifests himself in the cosmos as the various elements of the universe. In the Bhasmajābālopaniṣad (Ayyangar 1953:179) Śiva says: "I (the reputed Rudra) am the earth; I am the waters; I am fire; I am air; I am Kala (time); I am the cardinal points; I am the Atman..." and in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, usually regarded as the earliest writing in the Śaiva tradition, the human body is conceived as made up of the same elements: by following certain practices "the Yogi gains full power over his body, which is built of the five material elements (earth, water, fire, air and ether)" (quoted in Bhattacharya 1975:982).

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[1]Twelve is a sacred Hindu number; cf. John W. Spellman, "The Symbolic Significance of the Number Twelve in Ancient India," Journal of Asian Studies, 22, 1, 1962, 79-88.

[2]Listed in Gopinatha Rao (1968:82-85).

[3]The shrines and their respective elements are Ekambareśvara (earth), Kalahasti (water), Jambukeśvara (air), Chidambaram (ether) and Arunachala (at Tiruvanamalai; fire) (Bharati 1970:99).

The association of Śiva with the various physical elements and places is a topic of great interest which has been little investigated. Nor can it be fully analysed in the present research because of the absence of a jyotir, svāyambhuva or bhūta liṅga from Bengal.[1] Śaivism is not as popular in Bengal as in Kashmir and the south of India. We shall restrict the analysis of Śaivite centres to that which concerns two places of pilgrimage to Śiva in West Bengal -- Tarakeswar and Bakreswar.

Although Tarakeswar is not found listed among the categories of liṅgas discussed above, it is at present an important place of pilgrimage in India. Banerjea (1953:65) includes it in his list of the most important Śaivite centres in India, as do Crooke (1956:25) and Walker (1968:596). Its importance is perhaps best indicated by the large numbers of pilgrims who daily frequent the temple.

Tarakeswar is one of the places of pilgrimage researched in depth in this study, and so it is not necessary to say much at this point about this site in particular. It was mentioned above, however, that Tarakeswar, although not a jyotirliṅga, associates itself with one of the most famous of these Śaiva kṣetras (places). Residents and priests of Tarakeswar frequently refer to the town by the epithet 'Gupta Varāṇasī', hidden Benares. By this name they assert that Tarakeswar is identical with Benares, with its greatness (māhātmya) and its holiness, despite outward appearances of difference and separation.[2] Additionally, the narrative of origin of the temple (infra Chapter IV) is careful to stress the fact that the liṅga of Tarakeswar was

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[1]One interesting idea on the relationship between Śaiva pilgrimage centres and the Śaiva cult (similar to the relationship between Śāktism and the pīṭhas) is suggested in the belief that the founding saints of the Vira-śaiva (Liṅgayat) sect of South India were born out of five of the jyotirliṅgas (Jash 1974:101). A Vira-śaiva place of pilgrimage is analysed in Parvathamma (1971).

[2]A similar process is implied by the attempts of the people of Wai in Maharashtra to create a "southern Banares" in their town (Cohn and Marriott 1958:6-7).

discovered, but neither created nor installed, by men.[1] Tarakeswar thus lays claim to inclusion in the category of places possessing svāyambhuvaliṅgas, thereby seeking to justify its claims to importance and prestige. Gopinatha Rao (1968:82) states that "a Svāyambhuva Liṅga is considered so sacred that it is above all the rules laid down in the Āgamas for the other classes of Liṅgas. If such indeed be the superiority of the Svāyambhuva Liṅga over others, it is no wonder that every village claims the Svāyambhuva nature for the Liṅga set up in its temple." This is certainly true of Tarakeswar. By these means Tarakeswar seeks to associate itself with and, in effect, claim a place among, the holiest categories of Śaivite sacred places. It is not a member of these categories in its own right because it was founded more recently than the writing of the Purāṇas which enumerate the various categories of liṅgas.

Bakreswar, in Birbhum District, is the second centre of Śiva worship in Bengal. Although a recognised Śākta pīṭha as well, where the space between the eyebrows of Satī is said to have fallen, "it is mainly famous for its Siva temple" (Chaudhuri 1975:134). Like Tarakeswar, Bakreswar bears an epithet: "Gupta Kāśī", again hidden Benares, but the liṅga there is said to be installed and not of svāyambhuva nature. It is claimed by the local priests, however, that the temple was constructed by Viśvakarma, the architect of the gods, lending a measure of supernatural import to its founding.

Like Śakti, the deity worshipped in the Śaiva kṣetra embodies within himself the cosmic opposition of creation and destruction, so that he is at one and the same time the great healer and the potent, creative phallus, but also the mad, destroying dancer, the terror of the three universes. This paradox is most refined in Śiva's apparently irreconcilable dual roles

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[1]A variation on the narrative or origin of the Tarakeswar temple has Śiva appear to the king Bharamalla in a dream and tell him not to try to dig up the bottomless svayambhūliṅga, because "None will be able to take me out of the ground. I am spread to Gayā, Gaṅgā and Varānasī (Kāśī)"(cited in Mitra 1968:1113),again associating the Tarakeswar temple with classical centres of Hindu pilgrimage.

as the ascetic and the erotic lover (O'Flaherty 1969:300-302). The possibility of generalising about the character of Śaivite places of pilgrimage in West Bengal is limited by the fact that only Tarakeswar is an important tīrtha to Śiva alone. It will suffice to say at this point, and to discuss in detail in the chapter on Tarakeswar, that the deity worshipped at Tarakeswar is Śiva of the pan-Indian tradition.

We have found in the narratives of origin of the Śākta pīṭhas that the pīṭhas are said to have become recognised as sacred places because of the activities of religious seekers in those locations. Oral traditions about the Śaiva kṣetras in West Bengal make a similar claim. Māyā Giri, the original sādhaka of Tarakeswar and Aṣṭāvakra, the seeker from whom Bakreswar derives its name, were both accomplished spiritual guides who either discovered (in the case of Tarakeswar's self-created liṅga) or installed (at Bakreswar) the image of Śiva for worship. It was following the initiation of worship that the temples came to be institutionalised as places of pilgrimage.

Neither of the places of pilgrimage to Śiva in West Bengal can claim inclusion among the recognised holiest centres of the deity.[1] Neither place can be said to be of less holiness, significance or supernatural potency as a place of pilgrimage because of this fact, however, as the Śiva who is manifest in those places is the same equally powerful deity found outside Bengal at places of acknowledged jyotir, svāyambhuva and bhūta liṅgas. Those who claim that Tarakeswar and Bakreswar are mythically identical with Benares seek to validate the reputation of greatness of their places of

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[1]There are, of course, other Siva temples in West Bengal. Ekteśvara in Bankura District, Baidyanātha in Hooghly District, Siddhinātha in Birbhum, Ghanteśvara on the Ratnakar River, Kapaleśvara on the Bhāgīrathī, Kalyaneśvara at Badreswar and Jalpeśvara in Jalpaiguri District are all places of Siva worship, but they do not attract many people to their temples from beyond the local area. Chandranātha at Chittagong (Bangladesh) is a Śaivite place of pilgrimage, but since the partition of Bengal it is hardly visited by West Bengalis.

pilgrimage by associating their sacred centres with the greatest of the jyotirliṅgas and svāyambhuvaliṅgas. In the case of Tarakeswar, this claim is substantiated by the reputation of the deity as a powerful and 'awakened'[1] god, and by the heavy traffic of pilgrims who daily visit the popular shrine.

d. The Vaiṣṇava Sacred Places: Līlā-bhūmis and Dhāmas

In the discussions of Śākta and Śaiva pilgrimage patterns, it has been noted that the legends of the founding of places of pilgrimage in these two cults frequently emphasise the role of a central personage as either the founder of the site or a spiritually accomplished individual who has recognised its holiness. The traditions underlying the establishment of holy places of Viṣṇu are even more explicit in linking the holiness of certain geographical locations to the presence of revered or divine individuals.

The sanctity of the presence that endows a place with holiness can be of two types in the Vaiṣṇava tradition. In the words of Śrī Aurobindo Ghosh (1926:214), it is either God resident among men, or man risen to divinity:

> One is descent, the birth of God in humanity, the God-head manifesting itself in human form and nature, the eternal incarnation; the Other is an ascent, the birth of man into the God-head, man rising into the divine nature and consciousness...

A saintly individual who leads an exemplary life according to the norms of the Vaiṣṇava doctrines imbues his environment with the holiness that accrues from these practices. This individual and his sacred place are described in several places in the Śrī-Narada-pañca-rātnam, an ancient Sanskrit Vaiṣṇava text (Second Night, Chapter II, lines 70-71):

> He who daily eats the water used in washing the feet of Hari {Viṣṇu} and his naivedyam {offerings} and takes his mantra, he becomes liberated while living.
> O Narada! The earth becomes instantaneously pure by the dust of his feet and the tirthas become sanctified.
> (Vijnanananda (trans) 1921:81)

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[1] jagrata; see infra. pp.126-27.

Even the Ganges is said to be purified by the touch of one who has become a purified individual (ibid:89).

The second sort of presence which sanctifies a Vaiṣṇava place of pilgrimage is the incarnation of the Divine himself. Viṣṇu is said to have visited sacred Gayā and left a two-foot long footprint (Viṣṇu-pada) there (Bharati 1970:115), which is now the central object of worship in the main temple. There are also a large number of places where the various incarnations of Viṣṇu appeared among men. Viṣṇu, according to text and popular tradition, has descended to earth in a variety of forms at different times. Ten of these forms are particularly revered as his avatāras.[1] Among the holiest and most visited of the Vaiṣṇava places of pilgrimage are the sites of the līlā, or divine play, of Viṣṇu's ninth incarnation Kṛṣṇa. Vṛndāvana, Gōkula, Mathurā, and Dvārakā are sites in North India where Kṛṣṇa as a youthful cowherd and later princely ruler expressed his divine nature among men. Similarly Rāma, hero of the Rāmāyana epic, is an avatāra of Viṣṇu whose līlā-bhūmis (places of līlā) at Ayodhyā, Citrakut, Nasik and Sītākuṇḍa are well-visited (Crooke 1956:25). Places which figured in the life of the Buddha, another of Viṣṇu's avatāras, are also revered by Vaiṣṇavas.

Bengali Vaiṣṇava theology incorporates the concept of the avatāra, but with some alteration. In their view, Kṛṣṇa is not merely one of the avatāras of Viṣṇu; rather he is the supreme personality of the God-head, and hence the most exalted deity. The doctrines of the cult propose that Kṛṣṇa has taken a variety of incarnations on earth, one of which was as the

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[1] Monier-Williams defines avatāra as "descent (especially of a deity from heaven), appearance of any deity upon earth (but more particularly the incarnations of Vishṇu...." The ten incarnations of Viṣṇu are listed in Banerjea (1953:55-57).

founder of their cult, Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya (b.1486).[1] The Caitanya-caritāmṛta, the most orthodox of Caitanya's biographies, has it:

> Kṛṣṇa...the source of avatars,
> made avatar in the form of Caitanya.
> (Adi Līlā II.91)[2]

Caitanya was born in Bengal and spent much of his life visiting or living in places of pilgrimage throughout the north and south of India. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas stress the importance of visiting these places which have been sanctified by the touch of his feet. Bharati (1970:119) states of Puri: "the Bengali and Orissan Vaisnavites regard it as the most sacred site in the world, not so much on account of Lord Jagannath presiding over it, but because of the connection of the place with the founder of their sect." Kennedy (1925:185) notes that "in Orissa practically every place associated with any visit of Caitanya is marked by a shrine, or is made the centre of a melā {fair} held every year." Places which were visited by Śrī Caitanya in his devotional wanderings were frequently the sacred places of Kṛṣṇa, which are now to be visited by his Bengali followers as places sanctified by the presence of two divine beings - the Bhagavat and his avatāra.

The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava cult is in essence and practice devotional. Members seek to infuse the emotion of devotion into every aspect of their lives in order to achieve the ecstatic joy of love of Kṛṣṇa. One practice

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[1] Murāri Gupta, a biographer of Caitanya, explains the difference between Caitanya as an avatāra of Kṛṣṇa and the other ten conventionally accepted incarnations of Viṣṇu by drawing a distinction betwen a yugāvatāra and a kāryāvatāra. Of the former, there have been only four, one in each of the four ages (yugas) of man. Caitanya is the last of these, the avatāra of the present Kālī-yuga. The latter group are the historical ten (De 1961: 230). For a summary of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theory of avatāras, see De (1961:240-51).

[2] All quotations from the Caitanya-caritāmṛta are from the translation by N.K. Ray (1959).

which creates the subjective sentiments of devotion (bhakti) is retracing the footsteps of those who are the objects of devotion or who, by their saintly guidance, have illuminated the path. Rūpā Gosvāmin, one of the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana and the first to systematise the practices expounded by Caitanya, summarised the 64 pious acts which are the practices of the Vaiṣṇava devotee in his sādhanā of Vaidhī bhakti, devotion by life actions. These included "dwelling in sacred places of pilgrimage (Tīrtha) like Dvārakā, Mathurā or the banks of the Ganges" (quoted in De 1961:174). Jīva Gosvāmin, another of the Vaiṣṇava preceptors, considered pilgrimage to and residence in holy places and bathing in holy waters as one of the eleven external acts of devotion (De 1961:369-70; Majumdar 1969:331). The injunction to undertake pilgrimage is given its strongest expression in the basic Gauḍīya text (Dimock 1963-64:108), the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (Canto 2, Chapter 3, Text 22) where it is written:

> The eyes which do not look at the symbolic representations of the Personality of Godhead Viṣṇu...are like those printed on the plumes of a peacock, and the legs which do not move to the holy places... are considered to be like tree trunks.
> (Bhaktivedanta (trans) 1970:159)

The pilgrimage traditions of the Śaivas and Śāktas of Bengal are part of their all-India cult traditions. The Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal, in contrast, constitute a sect distinguishable from Vaiṣṇavas elsewhere. The crux of this differentiation is their deification of Śrī Caitanya as an avatāra identical with Kṛṣṇa (a classification which he himself denied (Dimock 1963-64:109n.)) and the direction of their devotion towards him as an embodiment of both Kṛṣṇa and his female counterpart Rādhā.[1] The sectarian nature of the cult has resulted in the creation of a system of pilgrimage places within and outside Bengal which are of special significance to

[1] e.g., "Lord Krishna manifested Himself like the full moon from the ocean of pure milk...as Lord Chaitanya." (Caitanya-caritāmrta, Adi Lila I, 6), and "Radha-Krishna are one and the same. But for the sake of divine play they separated into two bodies. And now they have been united and made manifest as Lord Chaitanya" (Adi Lila I, 5).

the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas.

The Vaiṣṇava places of pilgrimage visited by Bengalis are of roughly two types, both of hagiographic significance. The first type consists of places sacred because of the presence or residence there of Śrī Caitanya and the second the places of his saintly followers. The former include Puri, Mathurā, Vṛndāvana, Dvārakā and Gayā outside of Bengal. Within Bengal, places sacred as Caitanya's līlā-bhūmis are: Navadvip (Nadia District) and Mayapur (opposite Navadvip across the Ganges) which are rival claimants as the birthplace of Caitanya; Katwa (Kāṭavā) (Burdwan District) where Caitanya took the vows of sannyās; and several lesser places (including Barangar, near Calcutta, and Anarbati, Hooghly) where Caitanya visited. Next to these places, the Śrī-pats (holy shrines) of the four principle disciples of Caitanya are revered. These are: (1) Santipur (Sāntipura), Nadia District: the Advaita Mahāprabhū pat, (2) Kardah, 24 Parganas District: Śrī Nityānanda pat,[1] (3) Vikrampur, Dacca District, Bangladesh: Gadādhara pat, and (4) the Śrīvāsa-Angana (in Navadvip): Śrīvāsa pat.

After the līlā-bhūmis of these five (the pañca-tattva, or 'five principles' of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava cult), every place of residence of a revered Vaiṣṇava is a tīrtha, although only a few of these are much visited by pilgrims. One sacred place - Kenduli, in Birbhum District - is sacred to Vaiṣṇavas because of its association with Jayadeva, who predated Caitanya. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas emphasise personal discipleship in their cult, and so individuals tend to express feelings of reverence for the holy people and places associated with the spiritual lineage of their guru. Śrī Nityānanda, to take one example, had twelve comrades and disciples whose shrines are sacred to his followers.[2] In addition to these places,

[1] The Śyāmā-canda Mandira, containing images of Gaura-nitai; cf. O'Malley (1914:246-48).

[2] Listed in Bhakti Pradip Tirtha (1947:72-73).

Saidabad, the pat of his son in Murshidabad, is also much visited by followers in the line of Nityānanda, as is his birthplace at Birchandrapur (Birbhum). The Śākta pīṭha and Śaiva centre of Bakreswar is said by the priests there to have been visited by Nityānanda. They claim that an imprint on a rock there is the mark of his foot. The reverence for spiritual preceptors has given rise to innumerable such places in Bengal. Several which informant interviews and personal visits confirmed to be active and well-visited are: Ambikā-Kālnā (Burdwan): Bhagwana-dāsa pat;[1] Katwa (Burdwan): Keśava Bharati pat (in honour of Caitanya's guru); Mahesa-Ballabhpur (Serampore Municipality, Hooghly): where Dhruvānanda Brahmacāri installed an image of Jagannātha (in Mahesa) and Rudiaram Paṇḍit installed an image of Rādhāballabha (in Ballabhpur) (cf. Banerji 1972:720-21); Saptagram (Hooghly): Uddharan Datta Thākur pat and Raghunātha-dāsa pat; Agradvīpa (Nadia): Gopinātha pat.[2]

Among all of these, however, the consensus among informants was that Navadvip-Mayapur, Santipur and Kardah were universally recognised as important tīrthas. This ranking reflects the central position of Caitanya in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava cult, followed by Advaita and Nityānanda. These places also derive some importance and sanctity from their location along the Ganges River.

The Vaiṣṇava cult of devotion emphasises the importance of correct living for the achievement of the experience of divine love in this life. To this end, the lives of those who are models or guides for behaviour are celebrated, and the places where they practised their sādhanā are sacralised. These places, in turn, become living centres of devotional activity where

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[1]The temple was built by Gaurī-dāsa, and contains images of Caitanya and Nityānanda; cf. Kennedy (1925:183).

[2]Bhandarkar (1965:85) notes two places of pilgrimage of Śrī Caitanya located in the part of Bengal which is now Bangladesh: "There is a shrine dedicated to Caitanya in the vicinity of Dhakadaksina in Northern Sylhet, where his father originally lived. It is visited by pilgrims from all parts of the

one not only encounters the sacred dust of the place, but also finds a community of Vaiṣṇavas, the temples and daily worship of the deity, the annual festivals, the inspiration and teaching of those who are advanced in the Vaiṣṇava practices and an environment permeated with the devotion and love that one seeks to cultivate in his life. These living features of the Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage centres in their turn contribute to the sanctity and reputation of the places. The Śrī Nārada-pañca-rātnam says that "By Bhakti Yoga {the practices of devotion}...the tirthas all become pure" (First Night, Chapter XIII, line 20, p.61). Later it is asserted that taking initiation in such a place assures one of spiritual liberation:

> If one takes the mantras of Rādhā and Krishṇa from a Vaiṣṇava Brāhmin in the pure Nārāyaṇkṣettram, one gets Mukti.
>
> Note:- Nārāyaṇa Kṣettram - a sacred place or Tirtha where Nārāyaṇa is worshipped or considered the presiding deity.
> (Second Night, Chapter VII, line 27; Vijnanananda 1921:112)

By visiting the places of Vaiṣṇava devotional activity and participating in the activities held there, the devotee reaches the ultimate goals which the cult sets for an individual. Taking the dust of the feet of the holy man or avatāra, a powerful symbol of humble devotion and of the spiritual power of the holy (who can infuse even dust with power), is done by visiting the tīrthas. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa warns that "The person who has not at any time received the dust of the feet of a pure devotee of the Lord upon his head certainly is a dead body" (Bhaktivedanta 1970:162). The celebration of the holy dust (pada-dhūlī) of the feet of Śrī Caitanya is the occasion of an annual festival in Navadvip, his birthplace, called Dhulot. Devotees perform a round of the town (parikramā) accompanied by devotional songs (saṅkīrtana) and rub the dust of the street, sacralised

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district and even from Bengal", and "At Khetur, in the Rajasahi district, a temple is erected in his honour, where a religious fair is held in the month of October, which is attended by about 25,000 persons."

by Śri Caitanya's touch almost 500 years ago, onto their bodies and heads as they go.

Dimock (1970:113) comments that present day devotional activity among the Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal "is only a remnant of the vigor and enthusiasm which the earlier texts reflect." Be that as it may, in the Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage centres of Bengal today, the throngs of Vaiṣṇavas decorated with the marks of Viṣṇu between the eyebrows and down the nose, beating the mṛdaṅga (drum) and cymbals, dancing happily in the streets and weeping freely as their hearts are melted by the pure emotion of the saṅkīrtana, represent a powerful statement of the lasting impact of Śrī Caitanya's bhakti revival. Seeking devotion, the company of holy people, contact with holy places and inspiration to pursue single-minded devotion to Kṛṣṇa, the bhaktas (devotees) bear the name of Kṛṣṇa on their lips as they move among the sacred places which have been sacralised by the presence of mahātmās (great souls) and by the living community of devotees. Pilgrimage is one of the acts of devotion, but it is emphasised that it is the devotion, the intent of the act, that is its essential ingredient. Little accrues from visiting a holy place without the proper attitude, because it is the correct frame of mind -- a devotional mentality -- which pilgrimage and the other devotional practices are meant to cultivate. It is said about Navadvip that the līlā of Śrī Caitanya continues there to this day, but only those whose hearts have been opened by devotion can perceive it and so reap the fruit of their pilgrimage.

e. Pīrasthānas

Throughout the Muslim world a folk tradition of veneration for saintly individuals has existed coincident and at times in opposition to the

tradition of unique prophethood. Saints and their tombs are considered sacred and pilgrimage to both is widely practised. We shall have occasion later to go into greater depth on the tradition of pilgrimage to saints' tombs in Morocco and Israel, drawing on the work of Dale Eickelman and Emanuel Marx. West Bengal has itself a sizeable Muslim population[1] and a long history of interaction between Muslims and Hindus. The tombs of Muslim saints which are to be found in West Bengal are important centres in the regional pilgrimage tradition.

It is popular Hindu practice to revere individuals who have achieved some measure of religious inspiration in their lives. While alive, saints are considered to be in contact with, merged in, or even descended from the divine realm. In many cases such veneration does not end when the saint ceases to exist on this earthly plane. The veneration of saintly individuals by Hindus is not exclusive to Hindu holy men. Muslims, Buddhists, Christians or members of any religion who evince the characteristics of personal spiritual accomplishments of the sort approved by the Hindu tradition are accepted as God-inspired by Hindus. So it is that Buddha is considered by Hindus to be one of the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu, and the Bāul musicians of Bengal "have been declaring in their songs the absolute identity of Rāma and Rahim, of Christ (Beng. Khṛṣṭa) and Kṛṣṇa (vulgo Kṛṣṭa)..." (Sircar 1973:24-25). Saintly individuals are considered to be above the accepted divisions of mundane human society. The soul of the spiritually realised person presents an image of divine greatness and the goal of human spiritual endeavour, be he the follower of a Hindu sect, Islam, Buddhism or Christianity.

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[1]The 1971 Census found that 20.40% of the population of West Bengal was Muslim, compared to the national Indian figure of 11.21%.

The tradition of _pīr_ worship in West Bengal is an example of Hindu veneration of Muslim holy men. The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics defines _pīr_ as "a term denoting a spiritual director or guide among the Sūfīs, or mystics of Islam....Theoretically speaking, anyone who has advanced sufficiently in the mystical experience of divine reality may undertake to give spiritual guidance to others. But, as a matter of fact, the pir...nearly always bases his right to direct souls on the authorisation of some teacher who has directed him in the mystic way" (1974:40). A _pīr_, therefore, has two sources of spiritual power: a chain of teachers reaching back through the Prophet to Abraham and ultimately to God; and direct personal knowledge, acquired by following the teachings of his order, of true reality, being "absorbed in the consciousness of Allah" (ibid:41). He may derive his authority in varying measure from his spiritual lineage or his personal revelation.

The spiritual accomplishments of the _pīr_ give him the power to perform certain supernatural acts. The approval of his teacher confers "upon him the authority to perform healing miracles and to work signs" (ibid:40). While the _pīr_ "is not said to perform miracles; God gives them to him, {in} all parts of the Muslim world healing miracles are attributed to {_pīrs_}; they are a mark of their special holiness (ibid:42). Of _pīrs_, Karim says that "super-human powers were ascribed to the Sufis such as giving relief to the poor, destitute and the patients, being present in several places at a time, giving life to the dead, killing anybody at their wish and telling the future" (1959:162-63). The performance of miracles enhances the reputation of the _pīr_ and popular veneration increases accordingly.

The ability of a _pīr_ to perform miracles is not believed to cease with his departure from the mortal realm. Maity, in an article on

Manik Pīr worship in West Bengal, indicates how belief in the persistence of a pīr's miraculous powers results in his place of burial becoming the object of the reverence which was directed towards him during his life: "When a pir departs from this life, he is commonly believed to be still present in spirit and out of this belief, his dargah or tomb, i.e. the mosque erected on the grave of the Pir becomes a place of pilgrimage. In India both Hindus and Muslims visit the dargahs or tombs of different Pirs for various purposes and offerings are made to them for the fulfilment of some desired objects" (1970:167). This statement summarises the core ideology of pilgrimage to the tombs of pīrs in West Bengal today.

It is sometimes uncertain whether the monuments visited by pilgrims are actually the burial places of the pīrs worshipped there. The historicity of the individual said to be entombed at that site is usually unverifiable. Furthermore, a very popular pīr may be worshipped in more than one place. Manik Pīr, whose worship in Tamluk town is described by Maity, is also worshipped in dargāhs in villages Sonadanga, Kumarpur and Katdanga in Nadia District and village Kotrang, Hooghly District (Maity 1970:170-71n.). Similarly Karim (1959:165-66) notes with regard to Satya Pīr that this pīr is worshipped "by both Hindus and Muslims in different parts of Bengal, especially in the western and northern districts even in the 20th century."

Several dargāhs are today important places of pilgrimage within West Bengal. One of these is located at Kamdebpur, near Barasat in 24 Parganas District. This site has recently achieved wide fame because, since 1944, a man claiming to be inspired by the spirit of the pīr has been achieving success in the treatment of disease at this spot. His cures are said to be communicated to him by the pīr Gorācānda who was buried there 500 years ago. Examining hundreds of pilgrims daily and dispensing herbal drugs to them, the activities of this man at the dargāh at Kamdebpur are a mixture

of pīrism and village medicine. Daily this 'fakir-bābā', a Hindu named Surya Kumara Maity, meditates on the tomb of the pīr. He offers pūjā to the saint. People coming for cures generally also offer flowers and sweets. There is an annual festival of the pīr in the month of Phālguna. The role of the fakir-bābā as a village curer is to be seen in his small office adjoining the dargāh. The walls are lined with bottles of herbal remedies dispensed for most cures. On Mondays surgical operations are performed. He himself appears much more like a wealthy country doctor than an inspired fakir. But, in the final analysis, the source of his ability to cure and the justification for his doing so derives from the spirit resident in the dargāh. Although elaborated with medicinal trappings, it is believed by patient and curer alike that the cures achieved at Kamdebpur are solely the work of Pīr Gorācānda.

Kamdebpur is unusual in that there is a living agent for the work of the pīr in the dargāh. More usual are the pīrasthānas (places of the pīr) of Alman Sahib, near Bainchi in Hooghly District, which is renowned for the curing of rheumatic pains, and Phulparas Sharif near Canning in 24 Parganas District, which has achieved fame for providing barren women with offspring, especially sons. Here pilgrims reverently approach the pīr for supernatural intervention on their behalf by dint of his spiritual force alone. It is common that they make manot (vows), offering to honour the pīr with a gift, pūjā or ritual acknowledgement in return for having their desire granted. The outside of many dargāhs or nearby trees are often covered with small offerings made by pilgrims in fulfilment of vows. Karim (1959:170) states: "In some dargahs people bind coloured threads to the branches of nearby trees to have their desired effect. In some places stones or walls attached to the dargahs are washed with lime. Sometimes people offer edibles to fish or tortoises of the tanks attached to the

dargahs." Small clay horses and elephants are also frequently given as offerings. Even small pīrasthānas such as Shahabajir, Hooghly and the dargāh of the Ghazi, Tribeni, are hung with many bits of broken clay pots and horses.

The tradition of pīr worship in West Bengal originates in a belief in the miracle-working powers of saintly individuals, even after their deaths. It is not surprising then to find that pilgrims to the pīrasthānas seek the fulfilment of earthly wishes. Cures for all manner of disease, relief from rheumatism and the getting of children have already been mentioned as motives for pilgrimage to a pīr. Maity (1970:174-76) adds relief from bed-wetting, cures for cattle diseases, production of sufficient breast milk, as well as other personal wishes such as to pass an examination, win a litigation, get a job or find a lost article as motives for pilgrimage to the dargāh of Manik Pīr in Tamluk.

It is conceivable that the veneration of pīrs by Hindus is made easier by the belief that they are divinely empowered individuals. They are approached and venerated as individuals, for the personal reward of the pilgrim, in a dyadic relationship which does not make reference to the Islamic tradition of the pīr nor the Hindu tradition of the pilgrim. The relationship is straightforwardly operational and reciprocal, offering a closed and limited exchange of worship in return for a boon. Although pīrism is well-established in the Islamic world, and is enmeshed with various significant religious and cultural traditions, among the Hindus of West Bengal it is the powers of pīrs as supernaturally endowed individuals, detached from any tradition, which earns them veneration and makes their tombs popular objects of pilgrimage.

f. Conclusion

It has been noted of places of pilgrimage in India that they are often associated with noteworthy geographical features (Bhardwaj 1973:87), particularly water. This generalisation holds true for West Bengal as well, and Map 1 shows how many of the Bengali tīrthas are located on the Ganges alone. While this geographical association is an accepted fact, it is insufficient to account for the existence or emergence of sites of pilgrimage in these places. For every place of pilgrimage associated with a river bank in West Bengal there are miles of equally suitable river bank but no tīrthas. There are several factors which account for the existence of tīrthas in their particular locations.

One factor contributing to the transformation of a mundane site into a place of pilgrimage is the religious activities of men. There are different categories of these activities, in line with the different strands of Hinduism practised in West Bengal, but for all, a place where an individual achieved recognised personal spiritual inspiration is eligible to be designated as a sacred place (pavitra-sthāna), and hence the object of a pilgrimage. This sort of development is explicitly a part of the history and ideology of the Vaiṣṇava līlā-bhūmis and the pīrasthānas, but the stories of origins of the other categories of tīrthas also frequently include reference to a first spiritual seeker who, in some sense, 'found' the deity at that place. At Tarakeswar it was Māyā Giri, at Gaṅgā-sāgara Kapila, at Tarapith Vaśiṣṭha, at Daksineswar Ramakrishna, at Tribeni the seven ṛṣis, at Nalāhāṭī Rāma Śaṅkara Sarma, at Bakreswar Aṣṭāvakra and so on. It is reasonable to suggest that if these were indeed real individuals, then following their deaths, the crowds that had come to them while they were alive continued to seek their inspiration in the places where they had lived. The tradition of seeking

out sādhus and enlightened souls, if only to sit in their company, remains alive in India today. The tendency of disciples almost or actually to deify their preceptor leads to the encouragement of visits to the site of his life as his memory and teachings become institutionalised. The crystallisation of the charismatic spirit of an individual gives rise to the developed, highly structured and ritualistic practices which generally characterise the temple life of tīrthas. The memory of the guru is preserved, but is somewhat transformed, so that it is not his accomplishments which are being honoured but the deity which inspired them on that spot. At Vaiṣṇava tīrthas, the deity is believed to be one with the holy preceptor and so again it is not the life of a man but the play of the divine which has been institutionalised. The actual evidence, however, reveals a central role for the acts of men in the emergence of this type of sacred place. Posterity enshrines these individuals for the glory of the cult and the deity.

It is sometimes difficult to maintain the distinction between the actual historical personages who may have been the original focus of a pilgrimage and the mythologised figures who are remembered today. While certain individuals are celebrated as the spiritual instigators of the pilgrimage or as the original discoverers of the sacredness of the site, the true role of these individuals in the founding of the pilgrimage cannot be known with certainty in the absence of accurate historical records. It is not inconceivable that local rulers or powerful residents of the area would promulgate false histories (perhaps even with the sanction of imported or well-paid priestly historians) to glorify their centre, and thus reap the benefits of its increased popularity. Nevertheless, the focal spiritual individual has been known to be of importance where historical records are available (e.g., in the cases of the recent saints

e.g., Ramakrishna and Vāmākhepā), and so it is safe to say that the ideological formulation of belief surrounding a pilgrimage gives considerable emphasis to the reputed inceptor, whether he is portrayed in an historically accurate or mythologised form.

Another factor which has proven important in West Bengal in the development of places of pilgrimage is the endowment of the religious centre with land and/or funds by a wealthy benefactor. The erection of a temple or the elaboration of an existing one plays an important role in the glorification of the site of devotion. While again not a sufficient cause in itself for the elevation of a site to a tīrtha, endowment taken together with a suitable site and the reputed presence of the deity in the place as revealed to an accomplished sādhaka, is significant for transforming the religious centre into a pilgrimage place. Endowment provides the funds needed to build and maintain the temple, provide temple services, develop establishments of religious culture, build facilities for pilgrims, etc. These institutional features, which are provided by wealth, are important for the ritual operation of the tīrtha, and lend it glory and esteem. These factors, in turn, increase the attraction of the pilgrimage to pilgrims. It is often stated by pilgrims that their reason for coming to a place of pilgrimage is the sthāna-māhātmya (the glory of the place) ascribed to the tīrtha.

The popular glory of a tīrtha cannot be attributed simply to its geographical location, its saintly founder or its well-endowed temple. It is rather that these factors, taken together with beliefs about the power and sanctity of the site, constitute a body of information, images and ideas which define the sacrality of the place and its suitability as an object of pilgrimage. The religious culture of Bengali Hinduism defines the form and content to which a pilgrimage centre must conform if it is to be recognised in popular conception as holy, and it is popular beliefs

regarding a sacred site's conformity to these norms which are the repository of its sthāna-māhātmya.

The mechanisms by which sthāna-māhātmya is circulated within the populace are numerous. Stories and tales of events that took place in places of pilgrimage are told in the village by returned pilgrims, travelling priests and mendicant sādhus. The important festival days of each place of pilgrimage are listed in the almanacs (pañjikās) that are the guidebooks for daily life of literate Bengalis. Other religious texts, especially the small ādi-māhātmya ('original glory') pamphlets sold to pilgrims and carried home, tell a version of the story of the shrine centres. Folk songs, especially those sung by the wandering Bāuls of Bengal, tell of the various places of pilgrimage and their deities. One Bāul song that I recorded at the Joydev-Kenduli melā in Birbhum District listed and celebrated all the places of pilgrimage in that district. Popular Bengali folk theatre (jātrā) frequently deals with popular religion. During my stay in Bengal, touring jātrās offered productions of "Baba Taraknath" and "Joy Ma Tara". These jātrās were based upon very popular cinematic versions of the same name, which played in cinema halls throughout West Bengal. A film based on the life of Caitanya was one of the first of this genre to be made. From all of these diverse sources, potential pilgrims become familiar with the places of pilgrimage within and beyond West Bengal.[1]

A tīrtha is an institution which must be analysed on several levels. It is a geographical location which draws people to it from a wide area.

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[1]There also exist pilgrim guide-books which describe the sacred places of Bengal as well as elsewhere in India. Although no pilgrim ever mentioned these books, their existence is worth noting: cf. Dikshitar (1971), Kalyāṇa (1957), Saraswati (1942) and Ragam (1963).

It is thus a 'central place,' with many central place functions.[1] It is an important node in the religious life of the people, often a centre for the propagation of the orthodox faith of the cult. It thus has functions within the religious community of the region. The tīrtha is also an institutional system in its own right, with a temple, priests, services of worship, etc. Fourthly, it is a focus of symbolic behaviour, and particularly of symbolic behaviour appropriate to the specific character of the different deities who are resident in the pilgrimage shrines. The ritual activities of pilgrims are largely indistinguishable from those of ordinary worshippers, except for the necessity of the pilgrims' journeying. This will be shown to be an important, and in fact defining, symbolic activity of pilgrims. None of the above is the pre-eminent characteristic of the place of pilgrimage. All are different aspects of its institutional character, and all exist simultaneously in every place of pilgrimage.

In turning, now, to three examples of West Bengali places of pilgrimage, it will be necessary to produce sufficient ethnographic data to make evident all the characteristics of a place of pilgrimage discussed above for each of the three sites. None of the three places has been studied previously in any depth and so the material derives from personal fieldwork and informant interviews. Each place differs significantly from the others: Tarakeswar is the most frequented place of pilgrimage in West Bengal and is a Śaiva centre; Navadvip is the original centre and lively focus for the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas as well as being located on the holy Ganges River; and Tarapith is an active and widely renowned Śākta pīṭha which is also a siddha-pīṭha.

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[1] cf. R. Redfield and M.B. Singer, "The Cultural Role of Cities," Economic Development and Cultural Change, 3, 1954, 53-73.



Tarakeswar: Temple, Mahanta's Throne, Dudh Pukur

CHAPTER IV

TARAKESWAR

The temple at Tarakeswar[1] is the most visited place of pilgrimage in West Bengal today. The position of this centre in the religious culture of Bengal is rather anomalous: it is not a shrine sacred to the two dominant cults in the state -- Śākta and Vaiṣṇava; it is not a classical or even ancient site; its founding saint is little remembered; and the chief religious functionaries of the place - the mahantas (abbots) of the maṭha (monastery) - have earned themselves a reputation for irreligious behaviour to the extent that the last four incumbents have been removed from office. But still it is to Tarakeswar that Bengalis stream in largest numbers throughout the year. Bearing pots of Ganges water on their shoulders and walking throughout the night, or with a packed lunch and fine clothing for a day's outing by train from Calcutta, or fasting for a week or more while lying prostrate before the temple fervently hoping to 'catch hold' of the deity for a boon, pilgrims throng to Śiva's temple at Tarakeswar.

Tarakeswar is a municipal town and thana (state administrative unit with police station) headquarters in the Hooghly District located at 22°53'N. and 88°2'E., 55 miles west of Calcutta, to which it is connected by both metalled road and electric train line. Trains run hourly from Calcutta's Howrah Station, taking the Tarakeswar branch line from

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[1]The name of the shrine is properly spelt Tārakeśvara.

Seorophuli junction. As a railhead and thana headquarters, the town has significance beyond its religious importance, and is a regional centre of trade, commerce and administration. The importance of the religious complex of the town is reflected in the fact that, according to the 1971 census, the third most important industry in the town is the manufacture of sweets, which are for use in the temple and consumption by the pilgrims.

The town of Tarakeswar has been undergoing rapid expansion. The Census of 1951 revealed a population of 3,092. By 1961 that figure had grown to 8,528, and in the latest Census (1971) reached 11,959. The population had trebled in 20 years. It is the temple at Tarakeswar that is responsible for this growth, as it was for the original founding of the town. While the architecture and setting of the temple are not remarkable (Map 2), nor is it a large and impressive structure, the name of Tarakeswar has received wide-spread fame in Bengal. Bābā Tāraknātha, the Śiva of Tarakeswar, has become known for his power, his reputation of divine living presence and his miracles. It is these features of the glory of the shrine, carefully created and spread abroad by previous mahantas, which attract the heavy flow of pilgrims seeking the grace of Bābā Tāraknātha.

a. The Foundation Narrative of the Temple

Unlike the stories of the founding of most temples, that of the temple at Tarakeswar has not been so cloaked in myth as to make the discerning of historical facts impossible. The story is well known, is frequently repeated to and among pilgrims in Tarakeswar, and always takes essentially the same form, with minor variations. The legend

reveals important aspects of the social history of Tarakeswar and its region, but also of the ideational system which lends Tarakeswar divinity and power as the seat of a living, active, wish-fulfilling deity.

(i) The Legend[1]

When the place which is presently Tarakeswar was under Muslim domination, it was a dense forest. There came at that time two brothers, the younger named Bharmalla and the elder Viṣṇu-dāsa, sons of Keśava Hajari, from Jaunpur District, in the present Uttar Pradesh state. They settled in the village of Ramnagar, about 3 miles from Tarakeswar. Both brothers were strong and courageous men, and they impressed the ruling Nawab of Murshidabad with their prowess. The Nawab appointed them to collect his tax revenue from Baligari and Mohanbagan parganas, and honoured them with the royal titles of rāja for Viṣṇu-dāsa and rao for Bharamalla.

Bharamalla had a large cowshed. Among his cows, the one named Kāpila ('tawny-coloured') was especially an object of envy. All marvelled at seeing the quantity of milk which she gave. But one day, the cowherd, Mukunda Ghosh, found that Kāpila had no milk to give. From that day, Kāpila went out to graze but gave no milk. Mukunda Ghosh became very concerned and one day he secretly followed Kāpila as she went out to graze. She entered the deep forest, and proceeded to a beautiful black stone with a hollow centre. Kāpila stood over the stone and released her milk onto it. Seeing this miraculous scene, Mukunda Ghosh was dumbfounded. He went immediately to Bharamalla and informed the king of all he had seen.

Rao Bharamalla heard the story and began to inquire about the unusual stone. He discovered that the local cowherds considered it to be an ordinary stone, and had beaten their paddy into rice on it, making its top hollow. He went to see the stone, and having been impressed, ordered it to be dug up and transported to Ramnagar where he would install it in a temple. The men of the king dug for 12 days, but were unable to find the bottom of the stone. Then, on the twelfth night, Bharamalla had a dream in which Śiva came to him and said: "Do not try to find my limits. I am Tāraknātha. I am all-embracing. Arrange for my worship in the forest itself."

Śiva had been manifest in the forest for 12 years. A sannyāsi named Māyā Giri, and called Dhūmra-pāna Giri ('one who smokes') because of his fondness, like Śiva, for smoking gañja (Indian hemp), had come to Bengal to preach the cult of Śiva and to meditate. His sādhanā (spiritual practices) performed while seated on a seat of human skulls, had been so powerful that, as he wished, Śiva manifested himself as a stone liṅga in the forest where he meditated. After the discovery of the stone by Bharamalla,

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[1]This story is a composite drawn from oral sources (several priests of the temple), small pamphlets sold near the temple and Ramdhan Roy (1870), translated by myself with the assistance of Ashok Chakraverty and Hena Basu.

the *sannyāsi* also came to the attention of the king. The king called the *sannyāsi* to him, and having been impressed by the miraculous powers of the holy man, he informed him of his dream. The *sannyāsi* concurred with the plan to build the temple, and Bharamalla ordered it to be done. Bharamalla then donated all of his lands to the temple and took up the life of a spiritual seeker. For the responsibility of worshipping the image, Bharamalla arranged that Māyā Giri would be the first *mahanta* of the *maṭha*. Mukunda Ghosh became the first *sevāit* (worker) of the temple.

Soon after, in the kingdom of Bharamalla, one of his subjects was suffering so horribly from piles that he could no longer bear the pain. Taking a rope, he made his way to the forest with the intention of hanging himself. But when he came to the forest, he met a *sannyāsi* who asked him why he was going to end his life. The *sannyāsi* said to the man: "Look, Śiva is lying just there. Take the *caraṇāmṛta*[1] of his temple and you will be cured of all diseases." Saying this, he disappeared. The dazed man found Mukunda Ghosh near the temple and prayed for the *caraṇāmṛta*. He received the sanctified liquid from Mukunda Ghosh, placed it on his head, and was immediately cured.

From this time on, the temple, deity, *maṭha* and curative powers of Tarakeswar have been famous far and wide.

(ii) Analysis of the Narrative

The legend reports the incursion of Rājput Hindus from Uttar Pradesh into Bengal at the time of Muslim rule. The events of the narrative of the development of the religious centre at Tarakeswar can therefore be reasonably accurately dated to 250 years ago, although the place was likely a centre of Śaivism prior to this time (Mitra 1968:603; Banerji 1972:726). Compared to ancient sites of pilgrimage elsewhere in India, the Tarakeswar temple is thus not of great antiquity.

There are three elements of the story of the founding of the temple which are of greatest significance and which require analysis: the story of Kāpila releasing her milk, the story of Māyā Giri and the episode of the man being healed by the *caraṇāmṛta*. Each of these segments of the legend contributes to present conceptions surrounding the Tarakeswar shrine.

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[1] Literally 'nectar of the holy feet'; the run-off of water, milk, etc., which is poured over the *liṅga* of Śiva in devotion is believed to be imbued with Śiva's power by virtue of having touched him.

The miraculous self-shedding of milk over a god-head by a cow is a myth shared by Tarakeswar with many other temples in India. Milk is one of the five products of the cow with which Śiva is honoured. This myth establishes that the appearance of the deity at Tarakeswar was not the result of human initiative, but was divinely inspired. The discovery of the liṅga was directed by means of Śiva's close associate, the cow, and only observed and recognised by man. The establishment of the liṅga is thus not the result of the will of even Bharamalla, a man, but of the recognition by man of the existent divine presence in a local manifestation. Thus the liṅga is presented as svayambhu, self-originated (Siddhanta-shastree 1974:71), and so within an especially holy category of Śaiva shrines.

The deity at Tarakeswar is believed to have established himself because of the satisfaction of Śiva with the spiritual practices of a sādhaka (one who practises spiritual disciplines) -- Māyā Giri. It is believed that the deity is obliged to grant boons to one who succeeds in mastering his human character by means of strict austerities. Māyā Giri chose the darśana (sighting) of the deity, and thus Śiva became present as a liṅga at Tarakeswar. It is possible that a shrine existed at what is now Tarakeswar before Māyā Giri's arrival, but it was the spiritual accomplishments and resultant fame of the sādhaka which might have transformed the temple from a small, remote shrine of the wealthy local tax collector to an extraordinary, divinely-inhabited tīrtha.

Māyā Giri was also the first mahanta of the Tarakeswar maṭha, to be discussed in greater detail below. It is stated of this saint that he came to Bengal to preach the cult of Śiva. About the time of the founding of the temple at Tarakeswar, aggressive, militant sannyāsis were setting about the revitalisation of Hinduism in Muslim-dominated Bengal. These

'fighting renunciates' spread throughout Bengal from their centre at Tarakeswar. The proselytising work attributed to Māyā Giri and his followers would also account in some measure for the growth of Tarakeswar as a major regional religious centre.

Pilgrims seek out places of pilgrimage which promise to satisfy their motive for undertaking a pilgrimage. Many wealthy or ancient temples, which are religious centres, are not places of pilgrimage. It is necessary that a particular characteristic of the deity, which speaks to the desired goal of the pilgrim, be believed to be manifest at that certain site for pilgrims to be drawn there. The deity of the temple at Tarakeswar has a well-known reputation for being exceptionally capable of and willing to cure diseases. This trait of Bābā Tāraknātha (as the Śiva of Tarakeswar is invariably called) is explained as having been part of the deity's character from the time of the founding of the temple, during the period when Mukunda Ghosh was alive. The miracles of curing that he performs are the source of the reputation of Bābā Tāraknātha for being alive, awake, attentive, merciful and powerful.

The story of the temple's origin reveals both the history of the construction and endowment of the actual temple building and its establishment as an influential religious institution in Bengal, including its role as a place of pilgrimage. Each of the three elements of the story of origin discussed above has great bearing on the organisation and belief structure of Tarakeswar today.

b. The Deity

The deity Tāraknātha is one of the manifestations of Śiva. He is conceived as a deity in his own right, but also as identical with Śiva,

who encompasses him. As a deity, Tāraknātha[1] does not exist only in the town in West Bengal that bears his name. A temple to Tāraknātha is to be found in Benares (Havell 1968:178). The name is also listed among the 42 sacred names of Śiva-liṅgas in the Kāśīkhaṇḍa (Siddhantashastree 1974:76). The character of Bābā Tāraknātha is clearly portrayed, both as an aspect of Śiva and as Śiva himself, in the stories and songs which devotees repeat in his honour and for his glorification, and in his visual representation, which pilgrims frequently buy in Tarakeswar and bear home as a souvenir of their pilgrimage.

Daily, in the early morning and in the evening, a group of men (purohits and local devotees) gathers before the temple to sing devotional songs in Bengali to Bābā. The first two songs which follow are sung by this group. The third song is from the popular Bengali film "Baba Taraknath", which played to full houses in Bengal for over a year, both reflecting and contributing to the popularity of Tarakeswar as an important place of pilgrimage in West Bengal.

In these songs the two aspects of Tāraknātha -- as identical with Śiva and as a manifestation of Śiva -- are glorified. Hara, Vaidyanātha, the Lord of Kailāśa (Śiva's abode), Bhole Bābā, Gajari Bābā, Triśuldhāri and Ḍamaruwāla are all epithets of Śiva and his manifestations other than Tāraknātha. Prayer and supplication is directed to Bābā Tāraknātha and to the other manifestations of Śiva. Other devotional songs sung at the temple glorify Śiva directly with no reference to Tāraknātha. In these songs, and in the popular imagination, the particular character of Bābā Tāraknātha is held to be a distinct aspect of and yet also merged in the character of Śiva.

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[1] The name literally means 'saving lord', or 'the lord of passage', from the root tṝ, "crossing, saving", plus the suffix -nātha, "lord".

(i) Songs and Image

Song 1.

Why do you unnecessarily deceive us?
Bābā, take away our earthly afflictions.
O Hara, fulfil my desires, steal away my pain.
Bābā, I have suffered immensely and hence have clasped your feet.
Through these feet, I have taken refuge with the salvation-giver.
Bābā, do what has to be done,
I shall never leave you, even if life leaves me.
You are the treasure of the life of the devotees,
Bābā, remover of earthly fears.
You are eternally bound with the strings of devotion,
You fulfil the desires of all, in whatever way they call to you.
Dvija Fakir-canda[1] says, Bābā, take away earthly fears,
The way you have shown compassion to Mukunda, O Compassionate One,
Please bestow the shadow of your feet on me,
End this coming and going.[2]

Song 2.

Is there such a physician on earth?
Bābā himself, Vaidyanātha[3], the lord of Kailāśa.[4]
Has manifested himself in the name of Tāraknātha.
Bābā has endless līlā and glory.
The Vedas and other scriptures and the gods such as Brahmā
Cannot even gauge its end.
Bargabhima,[5] the manifestation of Śakti,
Knowing him to be the lord of power,[6]
Worships him as a husband on this earth.
If refuge is sought with Bābā with a totally devoted mind,
Numerous acute ailments are cured.
To whom Bābā gives his grace,
Could he ever have any suffering?
Dysentery, cough, gonorrhea and fistula in ano,
Colitis, tuberculosis, leprosy and ascites,
Piles, severe leprosy, liver problems,
All sorts of diseases shall be cured.
If the sufferer gets Bābā's grace,
Easily he achieves a healthy body with a glowing complexion.
Bābā is the only help left for the helpless,
Bābā overcomes the devotee's misery.

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[1] the poet.

[2] the cycle of death and birth.

[3] Śiva as the lord of physicians.

[4] Śiva's abode.

[5] a goddess.

[6] Śakti, connoting both the female deity and power or energy.

If a severely ill patient in his pain
Comes to Bābā and lies prostrate before him on the ground,
His disease is cured within three nights.
Bābā keeps him at his petal-like feet.
What disease is there which Siva cannot cure?
If one gets the great drug of the mercy of Bābā,
He becomes eternally free of diseases.
His earthly afflictions are also cured.
Bābā is said to be not only a physician but a helmsman too.
Thinking of Bābā, a being crosses through this world,
The boat through this world is Bābā's pair of feet.
Is it impossible for him to obtain liberation?
Is there any Bābā so merciful in the world?
That is why the people of the world call him Āsutos.[1]
He is satisfied with the leaves of the <u>bel</u>[2] tree annointed with sandal.
If there is devotion, there will surely be liberation.
Tārakeśvara Tāraknātha whose name is Bholā,[3]
Because he has descended to give the raft of his feet,
Mukunda the cowherd has attained salvation.
All devotees are equal in the eyes of Bābā.
Please fulfil the desire of sinner Yogīndra,[4]
This is the submission at your feet, O merciful Kṛittivāsa[5]
By granting your feet at the end, destroy the fear of death.
He {the poet} does not want any other wealth.

Song 3.

Go on with the carrying pole on your shoulder,
Chanting Jayo Bābā,
Bhole Bābā will help us cross,
Gajari Bābā will help us cross,[6]
Go forward taking his name only,
Bhole Bābā will help us cross.
There is no other prayer after him,
All roads end at his feet.
The cry rises hailing him:
Jayo Tārakeśvara, Jayo Tārakeśvara.
Triśuldhāri[7] will help us cross,
Jaṭadhāri[8] will help us cross

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[1]Śiva as one who is easily satisfied.

[2]*aegle marmelos*.

[3]Śiva as one who forgets.

[4]the poet.

[5]Śiva clothed in a skin.

[6]All lines in this song with the words "will help us cross" are, for reasons about which one can only speculate, in Hindi in the original.

[7]Śiva as one who holds the trident.

[8]Śiva as one with matted hair.

The deaf and the dumb go, the lame and the blind go,
The aged and the ailing go, the good and the bad go,
Bom Bom Tārak Bom, Bhole Bom Tārak Bom.
The sterile women go, the ascetic, the sinner, the worthless go,
All pray alike that Bābā will grant a boon.
We will reach you, however much rain and storm you send.
My Bābā is very good, always doing good.
You will surely receive Bābā's grace if you call him with devotion,
O my Bābā...
The rich and the poor go, the calm and the wrathful go,
The generous man and the miser, the meanminded and the lowly go.
Bom Bom Tārak Bom, Bhole Bom Tārak Bom,
The ignorant and the wise go, the mother and the wife go,
The young and the old go,
All saying the same that there is no prayer after reaching his feet.
The cry of victory is raised in his name: Jayo Tārakeśvara,
Jayo Tārakeśvara, Jayo Tārakeśvara, Jayo Parameśvara,[1]
Bhole Baba will help us cross,
Triśuldhārī will help us cross,
Ḍamaruwāla[2] will help us cross.
There! The peak of Bābā's temple is in sight!
We have arrived, only go a little further on!
Chant Jayo Bābā and go a little further,
Chant Jayo Bābā.

(ii) Analysis of the Songs and Image

Sarkar (1974:ix), in his study of Śiva, lists the following as aspects of the character of Śiva: ascetic and beggar, householder, peasant, warrior, hemp-smoker, dicer, patron of art, lascivious in character, associated with mountains, associated with serpents, associated with bull and performer of miracles. Tāraknātha, when identified with Śiva, has ascribed to him all of these characteristics. Some are portrayed in symbols which are frequently seen or heard in Tarakeswar: in the temple two stone bulls stand facing the linga, a silver snake stands beside it, the evening preparations of the linga include the provision of a pipe of gañja, which is carefully lit, he is covered at night with a cloth depicting him seated with his wife on a mountain, and so on. Reference to the print of Bābā Tāraknātha which

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[1]Śiva.

[2]Śiva as one holding a hand-drum.



শ্রীশ্রীতারকেশ্বর ✻ श्रीश्रीतारकेश्वर

Bābā Tāraknātha

was purchased in the temple area will show the liṅga of Tarakeswar (identifiable by the inset half-moon in front and flattened top) as well as Śiva and his symbols: the snake, trident, hand-drum, horn, ascetic's slippers, flowers and leaves, etc. But it is the last characteristic listed by Sarkar -- Śiva as a performer of miracles -- that typifies the manifestation of Śiva as Tāraknātha.

The deity depicted in the songs is one who is accessible to all in need, who demands little from his devotees in order to be pleased with them, who is great, powerful and merciful, and who will grant that which the supplicant wishes in return for acts of devotion. Devotion is usually represented by the notion of 'taking shelter at the feet' of the deity, as the self-effacing weak before the powerful. Bābā is referred to by his devotees as "remover of earthly fears." He is the great curer of disease, the granter of boons, the doer of the impossible, the source of all solutions. He is thus a god very suited to the fulfilment of the earthly desires of the faithful. This is, in fact, an important reason for the popularity of pilgrimage to Tarakeswar. One further aspect of Tāraknātha's character, frequently mentioned but not found in these songs, which also identifies his suitability as the object of prayers for welfare, is the notion of Bābā as jagrata. This Bengali term literally means awake. The present mahanta, Hṛiṣīkeśa Āśrama, explained the application of this word to Bābā by saying that if a man is sleeping and his name is called, it will take time for him to reply. Since Bābā responds quickly to the calls of his devotees, he is said to be awake to the needs of his supplicants, and hence jagrata. The mahanta was careful to point out that, in fact, gods neither sleep nor awaken. He concluded by saying that to describe Bābā as jagrata is a way of representing his promptness in yielding the fruit of devotion, and it is thus a term used mainly by those who come to Tarakeswar with earthly desires (ahik-kāmanā).

The idea of the deity being awake or asleep is part of a larger conception of the intrinsic human-like quality of the deity. The daily worship of Bābā in the temple includes activities which provide human necessities and luxuries to the deity. He is treated as if he had all the needs and desires of a man, and so is provided with two meals in the day, a pipe of gañja and one of tobacco for his pleasure in the evening, a pair of slippers, songs for his entertainment, a chair for him to sit on while smoking and bed for his nightly repose. On winter nights he is wrapped with a shawl and covered with a blanket. His stone image, which is treated as his body, is bathed daily and rubbed with oil. The deity is not remote, formless, inaccessible to the common man, but is very much like him. Although the methods of worship, mythology and conceptions surrounding Śiva in Tarakeswar show a great correspondence to the Purāṇic Śiva, one can possibly find in the strength of the tradition of treating Tāraknātha as if he were a man a residual feature of earlier Bengali concepts of Śiva, which were not entirely in conformity with the Purāṇas. Bhattacharyya (1951:7) puts it: "Śiva conceived after the ideal of the Bengali is not a yogin; he is rather an ideal householder or gṛhi." The deity can therefore be expected to be more understanding of man's needs, desires and wishes, and so inclined to use his vast power for the improvement of the lives of his devotees, who are mainly householders.

The principal characteristic of Tāraknātha-Śiva -- his ability to perform miracles and grant earthly desires -- is clearly enunciated in the concept of the liṅga at Tarakeswar being a kāmadā (wish-fulfilling: kāma = wish, -dā = giving) liṅga. According to the mahanta, there are generally held to be two types of liṅgas -- those which fulfil wishes and those which yield liberation. The latter -- muktidā liṅgas -- are approached by those who seek the other-worldly rewards of religion for the sake of future

incarnations. But the former have as their role the active engagement of the deity in this earthly realm. The kamadā liṅga represents the deity at work using his powers to assist the creatures of his creation.[1]

c. The Institutional Structure

At the conclusion of the previous chapter it was pointed out that the place of pilgrimage itself is an institutional system in its own right. The maintenance and propagation of a religious idea often assumes a structure of roles, institutions and practices. In Tarakeswar there are daily, weekly and annual performances by individuals and groups which give form and continuity to the idea of Bābā Tāraknātha.

(i) The Maṭha

From the time of the founding of the present temple by Bharamalla, when Māyā Giri became the first mahanta of the maṭha, to the present day, the maṭha at Tarakeswar has been the dominant religious institution of the town. Until 1925 the maṭha owned the temple and all of the lands associated with it. Even now the mahanta is referred to as the mallika (owner) of the temple. He remains the de facto religious and administrative head of the religious complex at Tarakeswar.

The term maṭha is generally understood to refer to an institution which is the dwelling place of a sannyāsi, that has as its functions the service of ascetics and the dissemination of religious philosophy (Report of the Hindu Religious Endowments Commission, pp.14-22, cited in Miller and Wertz (1976:7)). A maṭha is usually associated with a temple dedicated to a major deity. The maṭha at Tarakeswar is such an institution. Headed

[1] Siddhantashastree (1974:75) lists Tārakeśvara as one of the Siddhisa-liṅgas, or "the Lingas which fulfil one's desire." The concept is the same as that of the kāmadā liṅga.

by a mahanta who must belong to one of the ten orders of sannyāsis established by Śaṅkarācārya in the 9th century (Ghurye 1953:82), the Tarakeswar maṭha provides for any sādhu or sannyāsi who comes to Tarakeswar. It also actively propounds Hindu practices to the general population. The maṭha is, of course, attached to the temple of Tāraknātha.

A sādhu or sannyāsi who finds himself in Tarakeswar will be housed and fed by the maṭha for up to three days, and longer if circumstances warrant the approval of the mahanta. Further, a sannyāsi is given a small gift of money on his departure from Tarakeswar, the amount varying in accord with his rank within the organisation of sannyāsis. Those ascetics departing by bus or train will have the fare for the first leg of their journey paid for by the maṭha. At any time, two or three sannyāsis are to be seen encamped on the porch of the maṭha building (called the rāja-bāṛī, or king's house), and at certain times, such as just after the dispersal of the Gaṅgā-sāgara melā or during the visit of an important mahanta with his entourage (as happened in 1976 when the Śaṅkarācārya of Sringeri maṭha visited) the number of sannyāsis will reach 300. One priest of the temple holds the hereditary post of kaṭwala[1] which gives him responsibility for the care and feeding of any sannyāsi who visits. All are given the best treatment possible, in order to preserve the reputation of the maṭha among sannyāsis and also to avoid the vigorous demonstrations which sannyāsis have sometimes raised in the past when they felt that they had not had their due.

The functions of the maṭha in the dissemination of religion are all performed by or on behalf of the mahanta. He is a religious preceptor, a giver of initiations, a teacher of the boys and girls who study in the

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[1]Perhaps from kaṭa-vāla, master of the straw, i.e., he who is responsible for providing a bed (hospitality).

matha schools, an author, a pandit and a scholar. He gives discourses on religious subjects at meetings of scholars and the laity. But in large measure his real work in these functions is as chief administrator of a religious bureaucracy. The matha is first and foremost an institution demanding much administration. The present role of the matha, its relationship to the other aspects of the religious complex of Tarakeswar and its public reputation have been created by the mahantas of the matha, whose activities have kept the matha in the forefront of Bengali religious life, in both fame and infamy, for centuries.

The date 1925 marked a change in the organisation of the institutional structure, including that of the matha, at Tarakeswar. Before that date, a mahanta was succeeded by his chief disciple. From Māyā Giri to Satīśacandra Giri, whose reign ended in 1925, there were 25 mahantas (Giri 1920:iii). Because a guru initiates his disciples into the order of sannyāsis of which he is a member, all of the mahantas following Māyā Giri were bearers of the Giri title, one of the Daśanāmi ('ten names') groups established by Śaṅkarācārya.

The evangelical aims of Māyā Giri and his immediate successors led them to establish 17 subsidiary mathas from their headquarters at Tarakeswar,[1] each with its own mahanta (appointed by that of Tarakeswar) to carry on the local work of religious development. Until 1925 these mathas remained under the direct control of the mahanta of Tarakeswar, who was the mahāmaṇḍaleśvara (head) of the maṇḍalī (assembly) of mahantas of the other mathas.

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[1] According to S.K. Mitra (1964:1116), the mathas under Tarakeswar were: Varasi (at Gaṅgā-sāgara), Amdanga, Kṛṣṇabati, Bardhanan, Hauseswar Śiva, Raina Matha, Amra, Liluah, Baidyabati, Khamarpara, Chainpat (at Ghor Bhawanipur), Gumgarh, Reanpara, Nainagar, Santoshpur, Chetua, and Pancabadan. No one in Tarakeswar, including the mahanta, could name more than eleven names.

The establishment of these maṭhas and the work of countering Muslim influence in Bengal was greatly aided by the coming of British rule, which captured the attention and eventually reduced the influence of the Muslim rulers. The sannyāsis of the maṭhas began to turn their attention to the bolstering of their institutions through the accumulation of wealth, especially through trading. Under several mahantas, the Tarakeswar maṭha maintained a large trading network centred on Nagpur in Maharashtra. The capital of this venture was withdrawn by Mohancandra Giri about 1840 and used to buy a large piece of land from the Mahārāja of Burdwan. This purchase ensured the stability of the temple and maṭha at Tarakeswar by providing it with permanent wealth in land.

The trading and military activities of the mahantas point to an important contradiction in their role. It is a rule that a mahanta must be a sannyāsi, but it is said by the mahanta's critics in Tarakeswar that a sannyāsi cannot be a mahanta. A true sannyāsi must be a renunciate. He has no family, no possessions, no worldly attachments. He is to practise "complete renunciation of mundane affairs" (Ghurye 1953:84). But the daily exigencies of an organisation which, as the Tarakeswar maṭha, runs a school for the disciples of the mahanta, a Sanskrit ṭol (academy) and two secular colleges, oversees the affairs of the temple and operates a charitable dispensary, manages the temple finances, employs 100 people, owns 11 tanks and the town market, produces publications and holds religious assemblies, results in the mahanta being very much a part of the worldly affairs of his institution and his community. Responsibility for decision-making is little delegated by the mahanta, and, as a result, he takes an active role in the direction of all these activities. Although none of these affairs are of concern to him as an individual, as distinct

from an office-holder, it cannot be said that he is divorced from the affairs of the mundane world.

Deviation from the ideal role of sannyāsi has taken extreme forms in the recent past. Mahanta Śrīmanta Giri was sentenced to death in 1824 for having murdered a man suspected of being his mistress's lover (Banerji 1972:726). Later, Mahanta Mādhavacandra Giri achieved widespread notoriety in Bengal when the husband of his mistress beheaded his wife. In 1883, Mādhavacandra Giri was sentenced to three years in prison for his immoral behaviour. Although popular in Tarakeswar and the first mahanta actively to develop the property of the temple, Mādhavacandra Giri became the subject of a series of Bengali morality plays, satires and farces and even became an important thematic motif in Bengali folk painting (Roy Chaudhuri 1972:44; Knižková 1975:161-64). This fact reflects the popular outrage felt at his behaviour, and also the significance of the position of mahanta of Tarakeswar, which he was seen to have besmirched.

Mādhavacandra Giri returned from prison and in 1891 staged a successful palace coup to oust Śyāmācanda Giri, who had replaced him as mahanta. This action resulted in much litigation and physical intimidation which would likely have escalated further had Mādhavacandra Giri not died the following year.

Manipulation and deception characterised the means by which Satīśacandra Giri arranged for his selection to succeed Mādhavacandra Giri. He was an illiterate but shrewd and calculating mahanta who accumulated most of the present wealth of the Tarakeswar maṭha, and was responsible as well for spreading the fame and reputation of the shrine throughout Bengal. His machinations culminated in his being granted the title Rāja by King George V in 1910. Satīśacandra Giri ruled until 1925, the date of the reorganisation of the maṭha at Tarakeswar, when, following a large and

sometimes violent mass agitation in the town involving some of the most important personages of the political life of Bengal at that time, he too was deposed for improper and corrupt behaviour (Bhattacharyya 1977:107; Broomfield 1968:260-61).

Following the deposition of Satīścandra Giri, the affairs of the maṭha were opened to public scrutiny. A mahanta was selected to run the maṭha, but the work and finances of the temple were put under the authority of an Estate committee made up of the mahanta, two members from the Vaṅgīya Paṇḍit Sabha (Bengal Paṇḍit's Association), a member of the Mahanta Maṇḍali (i.e., one of the mahantas of the maṭhas formerly under that of Tarakeswar), one from the Vaṅgīya Śikṣa Parisad (Bengal Sanskrit Association), one from the Marwari (now Bharat) Chamber of Commerce, one from the family of Bhara-malla, one representative of the local citizens, one from the Zilla Parisad (District Administration), one official and one unofficial representative of the District Magistrate. The last three positions are usually filled by the sitting Junior Land Reforms Officer, the Sub-Divisional Officer and a judge of the Hooghly Court, respectively.

The new mahanta was an Āśrama sannyāsi named Jagannātha Āśrama. He sat from 1937 to 1952, when he too was forced by public pressure to relinquish his position. A strong case alleging immoral behaviour had been prepared against him, but a compromise was reached whereby he resigned and was spared his day in court. He was succeeded by the present mahanta, his disciple Hṛiṣīkeśa Āśrama. The present incumbent is apparently popular, but recently a pamphlet has been circulated in Tarakeswar (Mukhopādhyāya 1972) alleging misdeeds, misappropriation of funds and immoral behaviour by the mahanta. This could be the beginning of a wave which will sweep the present mahanta in the direction of his recent predecessors.

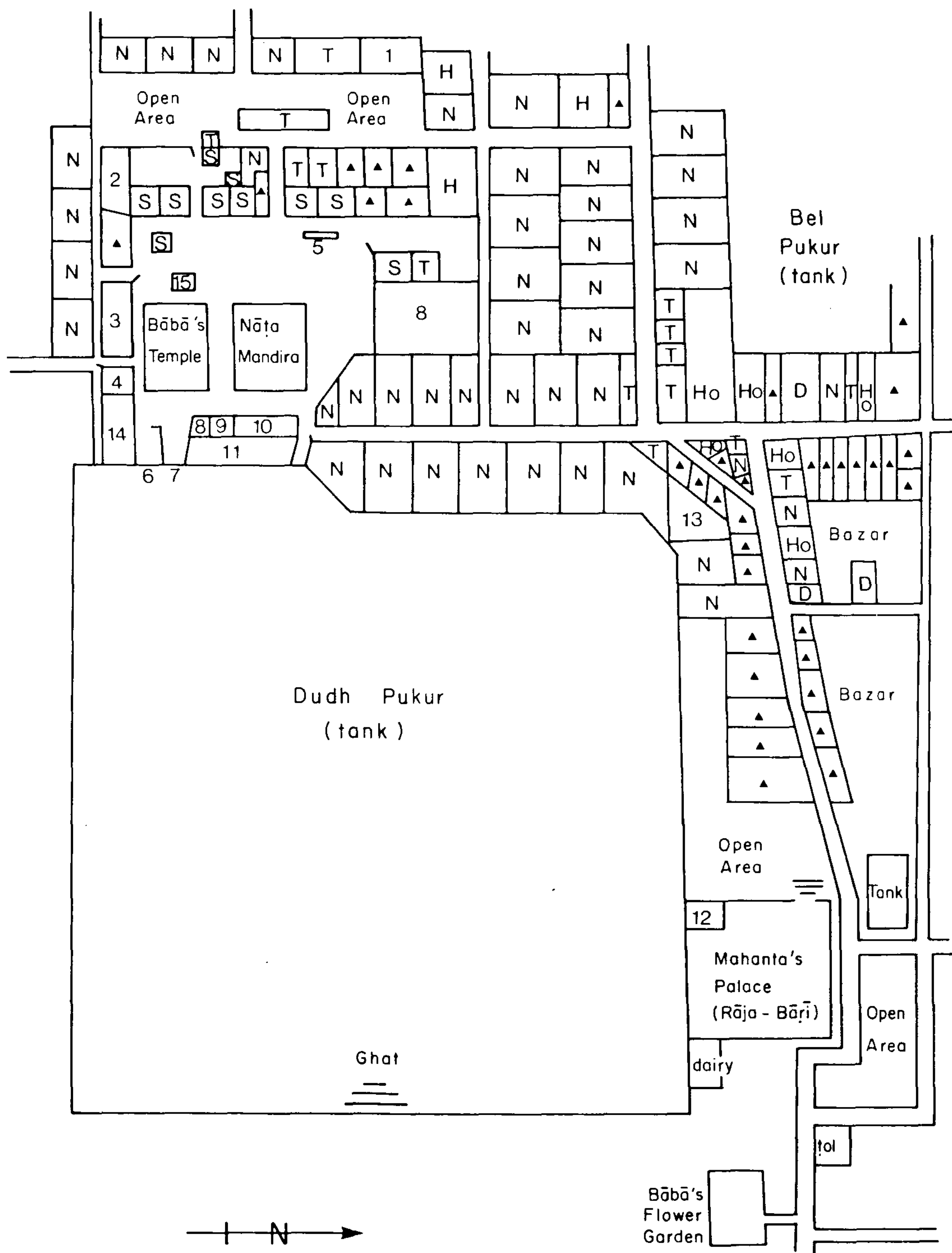
Although the irreligious activities of the mahantas have been

documented, one factor which illuminates an important source of ill-feeling against the <u>mahantas</u> is the fact that in many instances those who pressed the cases against them were local landlords. The <u>maṭha</u> at Tarakeswar became a landlord of weight in the last century and became the object of jealousy and fear of the other landlords as its possessions and power grew.

The <u>maṭha</u> at Tarakeswar plays two roles in the pilgrimage centre. One is as the overseer of the daily operation of the temple, the object of pilgrimage. The <u>maṭha</u> and its buildings are seldom visited by pilgrims and few seek out an audience with the <u>mahanta</u>. The second role, which has proven historically significant in the emergence of Tarakeswar as a major place of pilgrimage is to be seen in deliberate attempts by various <u>mahantas</u> to attract pilgrims to their shrine. The most ambitious and successful of these attempts was that undertaken by Satīśacandra Giri.

The Imperial Gazeteer of 1908 (p.249) states: "Two large religious gatherings are held annually at Tarakeswar" -- Śivarātri and the Gajan at Caitra Saṇkrānti. The same information is given in the District Gazeteer of 1912 (O'Malley and Chakravarti:106). However, at the present time, there are three annual festivals held at Tarakeswar. The third, which was not held at the early part of this century, is the month-long <u>melā</u> (fair) in the month of Śrāvaṇa. This fair is heavily attended by the community of Marwaris (of Rajasthani origin) in Bengal. A characteristic ritual of the <u>melā</u> is the practice undertaken by many pilgrims of carrying water on foot from the Ganges at Seorophuli to Tarakeswar. Older priests maintain that Satīśacandra Giri called a meeting of Marwari religious leaders in order to ascertain which was the principal festival celebrated by that community. Finding out that it was the holy month of Śrāvaṇa, he instituted the fair in that month in order to acquire the

MAP 2 : TARAKESWAR



LEGEND

S	Samādhi
▲	Shop
N	Nivāsa
Ho	Private house
H	Hotel
T	Tea stall
D	Dharmaśālā
1	Hari Nāma Pradaini Sabha
2	Kālī Temple
3	Rest Area
4	Nārāyaṇa Temple
5	Memorial to Bharamalla
6	Ladies Bathing <u>Ghat</u>
7	Men's Bathing <u>Ghat</u>
8	<u>Mahanta's</u> Throne
9	<u>Gaddi</u>
10	Porch
11	Office
12	Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa Temple
13	Hari Bhakti Pradaini Sabha
14	Kitchen
15	Mukunda Ghosh's <u>Samādhi</u>

patronage of the large and very wealthy Marwari group. Participation by Bengalis in this festival began later, and even today the Śrāvaṇa melā is also called the Marwari melā. Satīśacandra Giri instituted the practice of carrying Ganges water from the Ganges to Tarakeswar, now so closely associated with this shrine, in order to duplicate, and thus compete with, the other great Śaiva-kṣetra of Eastern India -- Vaidyanātha-dhāma, Bihar -- where water is also carried from the Ganges to the shrine (Chaubey 1958). It is further said of Satīśacandra Giri, perhaps apocryphally, that he employed sannyāsis and sādhus to travel to the many pilgrimage centres spreading the glory of Tarakeswar.

These three instances are examples of the role of deliberate individual actions in building the reputation of a place of pilgrimage, despite the fact that the popular tradition attributes the sanctity of the place to its powerful, self-emergent deity.

The present role of the maṭha extends beyond its involvement as overseer of temple affairs. The current mahanta sees himself as a religious leader with interests and responsibilities in the larger Hindu community. He frequently participates in conferences and assemblies of religious scholars, which he also hosts. Sannyāsis are always to be found visiting the maṭha. The maṭha is one institution which links the local religious centre at Tarakeswar with the many-centred religious field of which it is a part. It thus functions as Śaṅkarācārya intended, bringing the many local centres of Hinduism into interaction with one another. This network at Tarakeswar focuses on the personal agency and activities of the mahanta.

(ii) The Temple and Services

The mahanta and the Estate Committee manage the affairs of the temple.

Although pilgrims in large numbers come to offer worship at the temple, the official service of the deity is arranged, financed and managed by the Estate Committee.

The temple derives revenue from many sources. Its financial resources are used primarily to support the administrative superstructure of the temple and for the work of worshipping Bābā Tāraknātha. The temple no longer owns the considerable land holdings which it had accumulated. These properties were confiscated by the government at the time of the abolition of the zamīndāri system. But the government provides a cash compensation to the Estate Committee for these lands which, in 1977, totalled 84,000 Rupees. This constitutes the single largest source of temple income. Other properties -- eleven tanks which are leased to fishermen, the market in which the Estate collects rent from shopkeepers and some small land holdings -- yield a lesser amount. The temple also derives a small income from the sale of licences for exclusive rights to barber in the temple, to sell candles at Śivarātri or Ganges water, milk and flowers daily in the temple.

Although the income which the temple derives from pilgrims is a well-guarded secret, it must be considerable. A rateboard listing all of the charges payable to the temple for services is posted prominently in the temple. The full list is given in Appendix C. Daily from 200 to several thousand pilgrims pay Rs.3 for dharma-praṇāmi, a share of the sanctified food (prasāda) which is offered to Bābā as bhoga. Head shavings (muṇḍana) which pilgrims have done by temple barbers in fulfilment of vows, require a payment of Rs.1.50 to the temple. An average day sees 50 to 100 heads shaved, while on Śivarātri the number exceeds 500. Pilgrims also offer money, jewellery, gold and silver to the temple as donations. Pilgrims who credit Bābā Tāraknātha with the cure of an

ailment will sometimes make an offering to the temple of small gold or silver replicas of the organ or limb of the body that was cured.[1] From these funds the temple finances its own operation. The relative prosperity of the Tarakeswar Estate is indicated by the fact that its income is considerably larger than that of the wealthiest maṭha in the important pilgrimage centre of Bhubaneswar, Orissa, which had an income in 1964 of only Rs.35,000 (Miller and Wertz 1976:16).

Although most of the activity in the temple-area concerns pilgrims and festivals, the core of the worship in the Tarakeswar temple is the daily services provided by the temple Estate committee, and called the nitya (regular) pūjā. Traditionally the right to perform this pūjā was in the hands of one family of priests named Ganguly,[2] whose ancestor was the first purohit in Tarakeswar. The Ganguly's lost this exclusive right at the time of the removal of Mahanta Satīśacandra Giri because they had been closely allied with the mahanta and so suffered by his decline. At the time of their restoration to temple work, in 1937, they regained only a part of their former duties. From the time of their losing the pūjā rights to the present, the Estate has employed a full-time paid priest for the daily worship. This man is not a member of a traditional priestly family. The work of the pūjās is complex and so this pradhāna (chief) purohit[3] is assisted by the Ganguly's and other priests in the execution

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[1]The practice of offering small, metal votive offerings representing parts of the bodies of devotees cured by the intercession of the deity of a place of pilgrimage is also reported for Mexico (Turner and Turner 1978:71). Wax replicas are given at the shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal, according to a BBC television programme.

[2]The name is actually Gaṅgopādhyāya, but like most Bengali Brāhmaṇ surnames, it has a more commonly used shortened version.

[3]The current pradhāna purohit, Rāmarātana Bhaṭṭācārya, called by his title as Śaṅkara Sāstri, has been at Tarakeswar for 40 years. He was born to a Bengali Brāhmaṇ family at Benares; the place of origin of his family was village Kotalipur, Faridpur District, Bangladesh. He came to Tarakeswar originally as a paṇḍit specialising in public discourses on religious subjects

of the daily services. The duties are clearly divided, with an equally clear understanding of who is to substitute for whom in the event of one man being unable to perform his duties. An outline of the daily pūjās and the division of responsibilities is given below. The right to serve Bābā is restricted to the mahanta, the pradhāna purohit, the traditional purohits of the temple and individuals who are highly respected for their ritual abilities. The main acts of worship -- ārati (the circular waving of objects, especially fire, before the deity) and pūjā by recitation of formulas and the offering of ritual items -- are directed by the pradhāna purohit according to his personal understanding of the correct procedure. There is no accepted common prayer for the worship of Śiva.

Weekly, monthly and annual calendars are also observed in the temple. Monday is considered to be a day especially holy to Śiva, and this is recognised in the larger crowd in the temple on that day. Monthly the full and new moons are acknowledged in the worship and the liṅga is covered with a silver representation of Śiva with five faces (pañca-mukha). The annual festivals of Durgā and Caṇḍī are observed in the temple and all of the main Bengali Hindu festivals, such as Rāsa, Dola, Jaggadhātrī Pūjā, Kālī Pūjā, etc., are observed in Tarakeswar as in any Bengali town. But three festivals in particular are occasions for the greatest concentrations of pilgrims in Tarakeswar -- Śivarātri, the Śrāvaṇa melā and the Gajan festival.

Śivarātri, the night of Śiva, is held on the night of the 14th tithi of the dark fortnight of Phālguna (February-March). During the day, thousands of pilgrims pour into the town, reaching a peak in the

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(especially the Bhagavad-gītā). He took over as pradhāna purohit in 1952. He is married and has several children, one of whom is an editor with a popular Bengali newspaper based in Calcutta.

The daily pūjās of the Tarakeswar temple[1]

1. Mangala Ārati (4 A.M.): entirely performed by the pradhāna purohit

   a. bell rings
   b. door is opened
   c. Bābā is oiled
   d. Bābā is bathed
   e. Bābā is dried with a towel
   f. Bābā is given his daily decoration (singara) of three stripes of sandal paste
   g. ārati
   h. pūjā
   i. Bābā is covered
   j. the temple is opened to pilgrims (6 A.M.)

2. Sarkari (Estate) Pūjā (9 A.M.): performed with the doors of the temple open so that the pilgrims may have darśana

   a. Bābā is uncovered, bathed and dried by Sukumāra Ganguly
   b. phula-karaṇī[2] is performed by Sukumāra Ganguly
   c. the Ganguly purohits offer their personal pūjā
   d. other purohits offer their personal pūjā
   e. pūjā by pradhāna purohit (to the right of the liṅga) and mahanta (to the left of the liṅga)
   f. Bābā is covered by Sukumāra Ganguly
   g. jātris may offer pūjā

3. Bhoga Pūjā (4 P.M.): entirely performed by the Gangulys

   a. Bābā is uncovered, bathed and dried by Navīnacandra Ganguly
   b. phula-karaṇī is performed by Navīnacandra Ganguly
   c. singara of Bābā as a king (rāja-veśa) is applied by Rādhāramana Ganguly
   d. ārati by Vinayakumāra, Sukumāra and Lakṣmīkānta Ganguly in weekly rotation

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[1]This programme can be compared to the general forms of Śaiva worship described in Stevenson (1920:368-400) and with the principles of liṅga worship given in the Liṅga Purāṇa (17.38-40).

[2]Phula-karaṇī is a ritual of divination or augury whereby a Ganguly balances a flower on the edge of the liṅga and if it falls into the waiting hands of the sponsor, the wish will be fulfilled. Generally it is replaced as many times as it takes for it to fall in this way.

e. Bābā is given _gañja_ and tobacco by Śaṅkara Cakravartī[1]
f. Bābā is given a chair
g. doors are closed and _bhoga_ is offered by the Gangulys

4. _Sandhyā_ (evening) _Ārati_ (7 P.M.)

a. door is opened
b. _ārati_ by _pradhāna_ _purohit_
c. doors are closed
d. _śītala_ (cool) _bhoga_ is offered by the _pradhāna_ _purohit_
e. _singara_ is removed by Sātkari Mukherjee
f. Bābā is given _gañja_ and tobacco by Śaṅkara Cakravartī
g. evening songs of repose
h. Bābā is given a bed by Keṣṭā Bhaṭṭācārya
i. doors closed

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[1]Sātkari Mukherjee, Śaṅkara Cakravartī and Keṣṭā Bhaṭṭācārya are _purohits_ of the temple.

early evening. Having fasted all day, the pilgrims maintain a vigil all night, reciting the mantra "Namo Śiva", I bow to Śiva. Few offer pūjā to Bābā, the majority queuing up simply to pour water over the liṅga and offer things dear to Śiva: sweets, fruits, flowers, leaves, grasses, etc. Some light candles or ghī (clarified butter) lamps and place these before the temple. Offerings during the night are of curd, milk, ghī and honey, offered sequentially in each of the four time periods (praharas) of the night. An added attraction of this celebration is the fair which is held for two weeks in Tarakeswar at that time. Small stalls selling household items, amusements, rides and entertainments are all well-attended by the pilgrims. The fast of Śivarātri is broken on the following day by offering food to a Brāhmaṇ, then taking food oneself.

The Śrāvaṇa melā, or Marwari utsava (celebration) is, as we saw above, a recently instituted festival at Tarakeswar. Nonetheless, it attracts a large number of pilgrims, Bengali as well as Marwari. The Mondays of the month, being particularly auspicious for the worship of Śiva, are the most crowded days of the melā. There are no special religious functions at the temple in this month, nor is it a fair-like melā. The principal activity of the celebration is the pouring of Ganges water over the liṅga. It is called a kaṣṭa-melā, literally a festival of difficulty, when people undertake austerities as a devotional act. Large numbers of pilgrims carry water to Tarakeswar from the Ganges at Seorophuli in completion of or for the making of vows. The suffering of walking barefoot from the Ganges during the monsoon season is seen as an austerity which is rewarded by having all one's sins (pāpa) washed away as the water is poured over Bābā.

The Gajan[1] is the main annual festival of Tarakeswar. Occurring on the last four days of the Bengali year in the month of Caitra, it climaxes on the last day of the month, the Saṅkrānti. The core of the festival is the adoption by devotees of temporary vows (vrata) of sannyāsa and the behaviour of sannyāsis. Beginning on the first of Caitra, pilgrims from around Bengal come to Tarakeswar to receive a sacred thread from a purohit and to take initiation for a period of up to 30 days. Some sannyāsis vow to take sannyāsa for a certain number of days several years in succession. Members of twice-born castes, who ordinarily wear a sacred thread, take a new thread with their Gajan vows.

The first men to be initiated are the four mūla (original) sannyāsis, descendants of Mukunda Ghosh. They are the jajmāns (clients) of Rādhā-ramaṇa Ganguly, of the priestly Ganguly family. Other people may take initiation following them. Before initiation the prospective sannyāsi is to shave (if he is male), bathe and rub his body with mud from the Ganges. He then repeats a Sanskrit mantra: "Renouncing my own gotra, let me enter the gotra of Śiva." Gotra is generally translated as 'clan,' and refers to an exogamous sub-group of the endogamous sub-caste. The determination of marriageable individuals is its present role, but in the initiation ritual of the Gajan, the mantra is explained as meaning that the individual gives up all family, gotra and caste characteristics and replaces these with allegiance to Śiva alone and membership in the group of his devotees.

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[1]The Gajan (actually gājana, but more commonly in the literature as Gajan) festival is celebrated at many places throughout West Bengal, as both a temple and village festival of Śiva; cf. T. Mukhopādhyāya 1974 and 1977, A.K. Mukhopādhyāya 1977. The Gajan in a village of Burdwan District is described in Basu (1962:155-66); in Midnapore District in Nicholas (1967:56-83). Das Gupta (1976:279) refers to a Gajan celebration of the deity Dharma, but states that in recent times the Gajan of Dharma has been assimilated to that of Śiva, so that "Dharma has been frankly made Siva and the Gajana of Dharma really means the Gajana of Siva." See also Chattopadhyay 1942.

The transference from everyday social categories to the exclusive group of Śiva is effected by the initiation (dīkṣā) undergone by the devotee. All such initiations into the company of Śiva's devotees are believed to destroy conventional social categories. The Kulārṇava Tantra (XIV) states"

> the souls struck by dīkṣa attain(s) to Shivahood. With all karma burnt out by dīkṣa all bonds of Maya {illusory reality} severed, attaining to the supreme end of Jnana {knowledge} , seedless, he becomes Shiva.
>
> Gone is the Shudrahood of the shudra, the brahmanhood of the brāhmana; there obtains no distinction of caste where there is the effect of dīkṣa.
>
> (quoted in Beane 1976:245)

Furthermore, Pathak (1960:10) states that "the word gotra in connection with ascetics has been defined by Abhinavagupta as 'desciples of a teacher'." By these definitions, those entering the gotra of Śiva relinquish their existing social groups and become ascetic disciples of Śiva.

In the Tarakeswar Gajan there are no caste or sex restrictions on who may become a sannyāsi,[1] and in recent years there have even been cases of Muslims taking the vows. Yet a further indicator of the absence of conventional social bonds during the period of temporary initiation is the fact that a Gajan sannyāsi will not observe death pollution for a member of his family who dies while he is under his vows. However, if one of the Gajan sannyāsis should die, all of the sannyāsis recognise pollution by changing their sacred threads.

During the period of vows, the sannyāsis take vegetarian food, wear ochre robes, observe celibacy and spend their time in devotion, meditation and prayer.

Individuals take initiation throughout the month of Caitra. On the

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[1]A woman who is three or more months pregnant cannot become a Gajan sannyāsi.

15th of the month, two men from the family of Bharamalla of Ramnagar are initiated by Lakṣmīkānta Ganguly as deul sannyāsis.[1] Until the end of the month these and the mūla sannyāsis attend the temple daily. Other pilgrims may attend daily, be initiated at Tarakeswar then spend the period of their vows at home before returning to Tarakeswar for the lifting of their vows, be initiated at a temple near to home and come to Tarakeswar for a severing of their vows, or have the sacred thread of initiation brought to their home where they pass the full period of initiation.

The crowd for the melā at the end of the month begins to build up from the 20th. From that date until the 24th, people from Midnapore, Birbhum, Bankura and Howrah Districts and the Diamond Harbour Subdivision of 24 Parganas District attend what is called the Dakṣiṇa (southern) melā.[2] From the 25th to 29th, the Purba (eastern) melā is attended by people from the eastern districts of Murshidabad and Nadia and the other sub-divisions of 24 Parganas District. Calcutta residents visit particularly on the 29th day. It is said that this division was initiated in order to accommodate more easily the large numbers of pilgrims attending the Gajan festival.

The 27th day of the month is the Mahā-haviṣya day, when haviṣya (a preparation of atāpa rice (a certain variety), ghī, milk, sugar,

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[1]The Bengali word deul is commonly used to describe a particular category of Gajan sannyāsis. I was unable to get a satisfactory explanation of the defining features of the category. Bhattacharyya (1951:14) relates the word to 'temple', as do several Bengali dictionaries. It is perhaps related to the Sanskrit word devala, an attendant upon an idol.

[2]In years when Caitra has 31 days, the Dakṣiṇa melā begins on 21 Caitra.

green banana and salt)[1] is offered to Bābā after a special pūjā around sunset. Whereas on the previous days of their vows the sannyāsis are permitted to take one meal of haviṣya in the evening, for this and the following days, they may take only fruit. In the evening, all sannyāsis prepare three grains of rice: one is kept on a mud plate, one is kept on a banana leaf and one is touched to their lips. The mūla and deul sannyāsis do not touch the rice to their mouths, but, after boiling it, throw it into the temple tank.

The next day is called Phala Ahar (eating fruit). On this day, many people come from Ramnagar and engage in a race to the temple carrying thorny branches of beyunch or bonch (Fiacourtia separia). The deul sannyāsis carry with them a trident (triśula) from the Śiva temple at Ramnagar. Lakṣmīkānta Ganguly, their priest, is to pick out the deul sannyāsis in the crowd, take their thorns and triśula, and perform a pūjā in the nāṭa-mandira before Bābā's temple. The thorns are then piled in the courtyard of the temple and the chief mūla sannyāsi throws himself face down upon the thorns (kāṭa). Other sannyāsis then join in jumping among the thorns. The mahanta observes this from above, then throws fruit to the sannyāsis. Fruit is offered to Bābā by the sannyāsis, who then take some for themselves as prasāda.

The third day of the festival is called Nīla ('blue'), apparently in honour of Śiva's incarnation as Nīlakaṇṭha (Bhattacharyya 1951:14). This is the day of the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī and it is celebrated as a typically Bengali wedding. A marriage ceremony is held in the temple in the morning with Bābā as the groom. Before the ceremony, the liṅga is bathed with the milk of 108 unripe coconuts. After the ceremony, the

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[1] Regarding the haviṣya (milk-food) of the observers of Gajan austerities, see Kaelber (1976:359-60), where a similar milk-food, taken by ascetics as part of a fast, is described.

mahanta performs a phula-karaṇī wishing peace and prosperity for all people. There are bands, processions, strings of lights and fireworks. Many women, including Muslims, come to the temple on Nīla and offer lamps and candles before the temple.

In order to accommodate the large number of pilgrims on this day, there is no bhoga pūjā that afternoon, nor does the temple close for its regular afternoon period. In the evening, Rādhāramaṇa Ganguly performs a rite known a kapāli (kapāla = forehead, skull). He offers a pūjā for the mūla sannyāsis, then one among them nicks the foreheads of the others with a knife. The blood is collected and put on the liṅga by the priest.

The fourth day, the saṅkrānti, is known as Caḍak. This festival day was previously celebrated by rites of self-mutilation[1] and severe austerities, but in Tarakeswar this is now restricted to more japa-khela (the playing with thorns).

The following day is the Bengali New Year day. The six chief sannyāsis mix mustard oil and turmeric into a paste which they smear first onto Bābā, then onto their purohit, then onto themselves. They are then shaved by a temple barber. Carrying one or more of the Gangulys on their shoulders, they proceed to a nearby tank, the Bel Pukur, for a bath, then return to the temple. All temporary sannyāsis will have removed their robes and will have taken off their sacred threads and thrown them into the Dudh Pukur. The chief of the mūla sannyāsis removes his sacred thread and ascetic's robes, and the festival has ended, ushering in a new year.

The non-sacred calendar also has an impact on pilgrim attendance at Tarakeswar. As will be documented in the discussion of pilgrims, the

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[1] Cf. Powell (1914) and Chattopadhyay (1935) re: Caḍak and hook-swinging in India.

majority who frequent the shrine at Tarakeswar are members of the industrial work force and government or private administrative services and their families. For this group of devotees, their ability to attend the temple is influenced by the secular calendar. Saturday and Sunday are therefore busy days at Tarakeswar, particularly the second Saturday of the month which is a widely respected closed day for offices. National and state holidays such as Republic Day and Christmas are also days of office closure and hence of increased pilgrim traffic. Even Muslim holidays increase the flow of pilgrims to Tarakeswar, since offices close then too.

(iii) Other Features of the Temple Area

The temple at Tarakeswar is a shrine to Śiva, but that edifice is only the foremost among several temples and shrines located within the temple area of town.

Within the compound which houses the temple of Tāraknātha there are a number of other objects which capture the attention of pilgrims. Although emphatically a place of Śiva, Tarakeswar is not a strictly sectarian centre. There are temples to Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) and Kālī (the goddess) immediately adjacent to that of Śiva. These two temples, along with one to Lakṣminārāyaṇa located in the mahanta's palace, also belong to and are administered by the Tarakeswar Estate Committee. Daily service is offered by traditional purohits who receive no payment besides a share of the prasāda, but perform this work as a matter of hereditary responsibility for deva-sevā (service to the deity). The annual festivals of these deities are celebrated in their temples.

Also a part of the sacred locality in Tarakeswar is the large tank which borders the temple -- the Dudh Pukur ('tank of milk', which its condition little resembles). Bathing is an important preliminary to offering pūjā and is also a ritual of personal purification. This is the

goal of many pilgrims on their pilgrimage, and so the temple has this body of water at hand.

A last feature of the temple area is the many large samādhis (memorial shrines) raised over the graves of former mahantas. Each is a shrine enclosing a liṅga. These samādhis receive daily worship, bhoga and bathing, although on a far smaller scale than Bābā. The samādhi of Mukunda Ghosh, immediately beside the temple, is also much visited, largely because of the activities of six men who hold leased rights to do pūjā over the samādhi. They position themselves close to the exit of the temple and steer pilgrims from there to their own area of jurisdiction.

The temple at Tarakeswar is the central object of a large-scale pilgrimage institution in West Bengal, but it is also a temple establishment in its own right. The pilgrims are an important source of income for the temple, its functionaries and the town, but the operation of the temple -- its rituals, its service and administration -- goes on with little reference to the pilgrims.

(iv) Guides, Priests and Lodges

Pilgrims to Tarakeswar are served by several categories of specialist. The first person a pilgrim is likely to encounter -- in the train station, the bus stand or at one of the several road approaches to the town -- is a guide. The guide offers to supervise the pilgrim's visit and to make all of the necessary arrangements. For offering a pūjā or for other religious purposes, the pilgrim requires a priest (purohit). And for his accommodation, should he wish to have a place to leave his belongings, to rest or to spend the night, he requires a lodge (nivāsa).

Guides in Tarakeswar number about 400. These men (known most commonly by the English word 'guide' are also called pradaśaka, meaning guide, or

dālāl, agent) are all self-appointed workers whose only necessary qualifications for guiding pilgrims is a rudimentary knowledge of the needs of pilgrims (which are usually no more than for a nivāsa, a purohit and for the items of pūjā) and an associative relationship with the owner of a nivāsa where he takes pilgrims. The relationship of guide to nivāsa acts as a guarantee of the guide to the pilgrim since, should a guide be of difficult or unsavoury character, no nivāsa would risk being discredited by his behaviour. The lodge would not allow the guide to bring pilgrims, thus making it impossible for a guide with a bad reputation (in the opinion of the nivāsa-owners) to serve pilgrims. This check serves to put the guides under the patronage of the nivāsa-owners. The relationship of patronage keeps guides and their behaviour under supervision and introduces a mechanism for censuring improper behaviour among guides. However, it also gives the nivāsa-owners control over who may and may not act as a guide, sometimes resulting in corruption. Capable guides have been excluded from working because of their political views and individuals who are generally considered to be of bad character have gained employment as guides as a political reward.

The vesting of control over who may serve as a guide in the hands of the nivāsa-owners does not serve the collective interests of the guides, and several times, most recently in early 1978, they have formed themselves into a professional association. The Tarakeswar Tīrtha Jātri Pradaśaka Sangha (Tarakeswar Pilgrims Guide Association) is now undertaking to control access to the profession, to limit the number and to police the behaviour of the guides. It is an association formed and run by the guides themselves with the goal of improving their own working conditions and livelihood.

The impetus to form an association came primarily from the effects of the unlimited competition to which the guides were subjected. There has been no limit to the number of guides working. As a result, most guides

earn only Rs.150 to 200 in an average month and Rs.500 to 600 in the festival months of Caitra and Śrāvaṇa. Most survive only by being members of joint families with other sources of income. Guides must work a full day, attempting to snare pilgrims, yet will go for several days every month with no success. These economic conditions produce an environment which encourages petty dishonesty in dealing with pilgrims, and so the guides of Tarakeswar, as the touts of Gayā, Benares and other centres of pilgrimage, have earned themselves a reputation as cheats and scoundrels. The association hopes to improve the income of every guide by limiting their numbers, and thus reduce the temptation to dishonesty.

Even when a guide does find a pilgrim to guide, his income is small. If the pilgrim takes a room in a nivāsa for the day, the guide will receive 40 to 50 paisa of the Rs.2.50 to 3.50 rent. The rent and the guide's share double if the pilgrim stays overnight. For offering a pūjā, the pilgrim requires a plate of sweets which the guide provides, usually from the nivāsa itself. The pilgrim will pay anywhere from 33p. up for this plate (dālā), most preferring one costing Re.1 to 1.25. On this item the guide will usually receive 30p. commission. Above this, the pilgrim gives dakṣiṇā (offering) to the purohit and guide, usually between Re.1 and Rs.2. This is shared equally by guide and priest. In sum, then, the guide will earn Rs.1.50 from the average pilgrim. It is for this reason that the guide, when asked to provide the pilgrim with a Re.1 dālā, will be tempted to collect Re.1 from the pilgrim and provide a 75p. dālā. It is a general practice for the guide to inform the pilgrim at the outset of the total cost of his visit to Tarakeswar. The pilgrim will pay this amount to the guide and the guide will then meet the expenses from this total. There is room for inflating the total cost beyond what, in fact, the guide will expend. In most instances the guides do not cheat, if only because of

wariness of pilgrims nowadays. Although in some instances they cheat and go undetected, in a few cases they are caught out, a hue and cry is raised, and from this one incident hundreds of pilgrims bear home the reputation of Tarakeswar as a den of cheats and thieves.

As a professional group, the guides occupy the lowest socio-economic status. There are no caste restrictions on who may guide, literacy is not required and the low income ensures that only those who cannot earn more elsewhere will take this unrewarding employment. A very few, between 25 and 30, act as guides for nivāsas owned by members of their own joint families and thus are better off economically, sharing also in the income of the lodge.

The lodges to which the guides steer pilgrims line the narrow streets on all sides of the temple. Ranging from mud huts opening on an open, mud-floored courtyard to four storeyed brick and concrete buildings with cement floors and electricity, nivāsas qualify for the name if pilgrims reside there. There are 102 lodges in Tarakeswar, and all belong to the Bābā Tāraknātha Jātri Nivāsa Mallika Sangha (Bābā Tāraknātha Pilgrim Lodge Owners' Association).[1] This organisation, like that of the guides, sets as its goal controlling the number of lodges and policing the behaviour of the members. It collects 16p. per haircut in the temple and this money is meant to be used for charitable purposes, helping needy pilgrims who find themselves in difficulty while in Tarakeswar. This work was not in evidence during the period of my stay in Tarakeswar, although the money was still being collected from pilgrims.

The pilgrims are housed in small, bare rooms which improve in quality

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[1]Legislation governing the regulation of pilgrim lodging-houses in Bengal was first passed in 1871; cf. The Puri Lodging-House Act, 1871 and its extension in 1879: The Bengal Code, Vol.II, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1914, pp.199-214, 383-84.

with rent paid. Since few pilgrims spend more than one night in Tarakeswar, the rooming facilities are basic. All lodges offer common bathing and toilet facilities. The more expensive nivāsas are built of sturdier materials, are cleaner and will offer a mat on the floor, a closable window and an electric light and fan at the most. All personal necessities, including bedding, are brought by the pilgrims.

Most nivāsas also contain small shops selling the dālās, incense, tāgā (strings used in worship) and souvenirs for the pilgrims. In about 20 instances, lodges are owned by purohits, in which case room, pūjā requisites and priestly services are provided from one source.

In addition to the commercial lodges, there are several charitable pilgrims' residences - dharmaśālās -- in Tarakeswar. These have been built by bequest or by foundations which also maintain them. They serve a small number of pilgrims compared to the nivāsas.

The purohits are the most important of the specialist groups working around the temple. There are at present 130 purohits with rights to do pūjā in the temple. All are Brāhmaṇs, belonging to the Rāḍhī, Ācārya and Vārendra sub-groups. The original priestly lineage, the Gangulys, constitutes the largest single family of priests, but up until very recently it was possible for Brāhmaṇs who were not members of this family to begin work in the temple simply by getting the permission to do so from the mahanta. As a result, new families of priests have joined the profession, since the sons (and, on occasion, daughters' husbands) of priests have the right to inherit the profession. Most priests reside in the temple area or nearby.

As Chakrabarti (1976b) has indicated, the priests of Tarakeswar, while engaged in a purely religious occupation, do not themselves conform to behavioural ideals for orthodox Hindus. Their religious activities are largely confined to professional responsibilities. Although all profess

deep faith and profound awe at the power of Bābā Tāraknātha, few engage in personal religious practices such as the reading of sacred texts, participation in religious discussions, devotional practices or even offering their own pūjā to Bābā in the temple during the day. Noteworthy exceptions to this are to be found in the group of six or seven priests who have received personal initiation into Tantric sādhanā and who carry out the daily rituals this entails, and the members of the Hari Bhakti Pradaini Sabhā, an organisation which is active in organising celebrations, recitations and devotional singing on a regular basis at the time of the annual festivals, especially of the Vaiṣṇava deities. To the great majority, however, religion is a matter of their occupation. This attitude is most clearly symbolised in their dress. The standard dress of most purohits while on duty is a saffron dhoti and the decorative marks of Śaiva devotion -- three horizontal stripes of ash (tripuṇḍra) on the forehead and a rudrakṣa (a sacred bead) necklace (mālā) around the neck. But when off duty or attending a secular function, the priest will dress in the fashion typical of a Bengali of his age and class.

The involvement of purohits in secular Tarakeswar society takes many forms, all of them pointing to thorough-going integration. Marriages with non-priestly Brāhmaṇ families are common. Many families will have one or at most two members working as priests while others will hold paid employment or be professionals. Many priests belong to the mens' social clubs, youth associations, sports clubs and drama groups of Tarakeswar. Several have been involved in town politics.[2]

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[1] Regarding the sub-castes of Bengali Brāhmaṇs, which are now believed to have originated because of different places of origin and grades of honour, see Inden (1976:34-45) and Majumdar (1971:428-32).

[2] Involvement of a priest of the Kalighat temple in nationalist politics is noted by Broomfield (1968:248).

Chakrabarti (1976b:10-11) has identified three classes of priests in Tarakeswar according to economic and educational criteria. I disagree with this classification because the dividing lines between these groups are arbitrary and fluid, and the differences in income and class of the purohits are better thought of as being located along a continuum than as separate groupings. Priests earn from Rs.150 to Rs.800 per month and more in the melā months. There is a positive correlation between income from the priesthood, ownership of cultivable land and ownership of a nivāsa. Those at the upper end of the economic scale are few; the majority of the priests own a small amount of land and depend on a subsistence income from their priestly work.

Purohits have two roles in the temple: they act as priestly specialists on behalf of pilgrims and they perform many of the necessary daily jobs in the temple. Pilgrims cannot give pūjā without their advocacy and, in several instances, priests did liken themselves to lawyers, acting on behalf of a client before the Judge. The Ganguly's, and in their absence the Chatterjee's (related as affines), have the right to do nitya-sevā work for the pūjās, but other priests assist in the work for Bābā Tāraknātha and in the Nārāyaṇa and Kālī temples, dressing and undressing the deity, providing his daily necessities, his chair and bed, etc. Daily, four purohits prepare Bābā's main food offering -- bhoga -- for which they receive eight luchis (fried breads) daily, plus 7½ kgs. of rice and Rs.40 per month from the Estate. Three purohits serve the bhoga to Bābā. Others offer flowers, bel leaves and water to the liṅgas around the temple. Still others prepare the smaller evening śītala bhoga. Purohits participate in the singing which goes on before the temple morning and evening. Except for the preparers of bhoga, who work longer than the others at their task, none is paid anything except a small share of the prasāda.

A pilgrim to Tarakeswar usually seeks to communicate some thought,

wish or prayer to the deity, and for this he needs the services of a purohit. Having found a priest, the pilgrim informs him of the purpose of his pilgrimage. The priest then takes him into the temple, and quickly recites the appropriate mantras which the pilgrim is supposed to repeat. The priests generally do this in such a perfunctory and rapid manner that the pilgrim usually can manage no more than a mumble. Whatever the pilgrim wishes to offer to the deity is offered, then a portion is taken back by the pilgrim as sacralised by contact with the deity, i.e., prasāda. He then leaves the temple. In general, the order of worship performed by the purohit for the pilgrim in Tarakeswar is:

1. nitya pūjā (ācamanīya) - for the self-purification of the priest.
2. Snāna pūjā - bathing the deity
3. Sankalpa - the pilgrim's wish[1]
4. Dhyāna pūjā - a meditation
5. Puśpāñjali - flower offering
6. Praṇama - obeisance

The mantras for this prayer are few[2] and are learned by heart by the priests during a three month training period which priests must undergo once their appointment has been approved by the mahanta. Their training is under the auspices of the Estate.

The purohits of Tarakeswar attempt to maintain an ongoing relationship with the pilgrims who utilise their services. A pilgrim who returns to a priest for services looks upon that priest as his personal priest. This transition from casual service to perpetuated relationship is recognised in terminology. Any pilgrim is called a jātri (literally: traveller), but

[1]literally: determination, decision.

[2]Most of the mantras used at Tarakeswar are given in the handbooks: Paṇdit Śrī Śyāmā Bhaṭṭāchāryya, Bishudo Nitya Karma Padhyati, N. Saha, Calcutta, n.d.; Paṇdit Surendra Mohan Bhaṭṭāchāryya, Purohita Darpana, D.C. Das and Brothers, Calcutta, 1380 B.E. (1973).

those jātris who consistently call on the same purohit are referred to as jajmāns (client). The number of jajmāns had by each purohit varies greatly. The names and addresses of jātris are entered into small notebooks by the purohits, and in some cases these lists are used by the purohits for the sending of letters to their jajmāns reminding them to return to Tarakeswar. Sukumāra Ganguly sent almost 10,000 letters to jajmāns in 1977-78, while other priests sent from none to 3,000.[1] A son, nephew or other close relative will inherit the jajmāns of the older generation.

The purohits, like the guides and the nivāsa owners, have formed themselves into an association. The first association of priests was formed in 1939, but it collapsed when personal interests undercut its cooperative intentions. In 1963 a new association was formed, this time with the intention of defending the interests of the purohits as a group, especially vis-à-vis the mahanta. The previous association had been established and controlled by the mahanta and was therefore an unsuitable vehicle for acting against the mahanta himself. The need to do so had arisen because the mahanta had been appointing outside men to be priests, as was his right, while boys from existing priestly families were going without work. The purohits organised

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[1]In 1976 the letter sent to the jajmāns of Sukumāra Ganguly contained the following text, translated from the Bengali:
Hail to Tarakeswar!
The auspicious New Year is drawing near. On the occasion of this auspicious commencing of the New Year, I offer prayer, giving flowers at the feet of Śrī Śrī Tāraknātha.
May new hope and assurance revitalise your life afresh, may it bring real welfare to you, may your life be established in joy and your house and surroundings be showered with happiness. May the course of your life be happy, with health, prosperity, abundance and vistory. I am sending my good wishes along with the blessings of Śri Tāraknātha.
Ever well-wisher,
Śrī Sukumāra Ganguly, son of
Śītalacandra Ganguly
Special note: If sending letter or money order, please remember to include address for acknowledgement. Please do not send money in an envelope. If you want to observe the pūjās done properly, please do not come on Sundays, Mondays and holidays.

and claimed the right to recommend candidates for the priesthood. Now the executive of their association proposes the names of suitable candidates from the purohit families, and these are formally approved by the mahanta. Since the formation of the association the mahanta has not overruled the decisions of the purohits in this matter.

In other cases, when the purohits acted against the Estate and the mahanta, most commonly because of corrupt or favouritist practices by employees of the Estate, they took assistance from local political groups for their action. The link to wider political forces remains active today. While previously the political activists among the priests were all Congress Party supporters, today the priesthood is divided between Congress, Janata and Marxist parties, in line with the political climate of West Bengal at this time. The former president of the Youth Congress in Tarakeswar Thana was a purohit, as is the present secretary of the Marxist Forward Bloc Thana Unit.

The place of pilgrimage is a strange and threatening place to the new pilgrim, and he requires services and aid to make his journey a success. Guides, lodges and priests provide most pilgrims with all they need in Tarakeswar. Besides these, the temple employs or calls upon the traditional services of a variety of other functionaries. These are the diwan (temple manager, who is a Brāhmaṇ paṇdit holding the title of smṛti-tīrtha), the barbers (22 of them, who serve the temple by doing various jobs in the temple in rotation), a drummer (an hereditary post held by a boy of Mahisya caste, who also carries firewood for the temple), the sweeper (a woman of Kawra caste who inherited the position from her husband), the gardeners (6 Mālīs, who raise the flowers used in pūjās), the temple astrologer (a Brāhmaṇ)

and the temple watchmen (darwans). Many other products and services required by the temple, such as the provision of milk, bel leaves, gañja, etc., are procured commercially or on a contractual basis.

d. The Pilgrims

The temple at Tarakeswar, with its complex institutional structure, serves primarily one group of devotees -- the pilgrims. They, in turn, are a source of funds for the temple, its specialists and various support indistries. The pilgrims to Tarakeswar fall into two categories: i) tīrtha-jātris (the bulk of the pilgrims), and ii) dharnā-jātris (those following a specialised ritual of supplication to the deity by austerities in return for a boon). They have been surveyed and will be discussed separately.

(i) Tīrtha-jātris

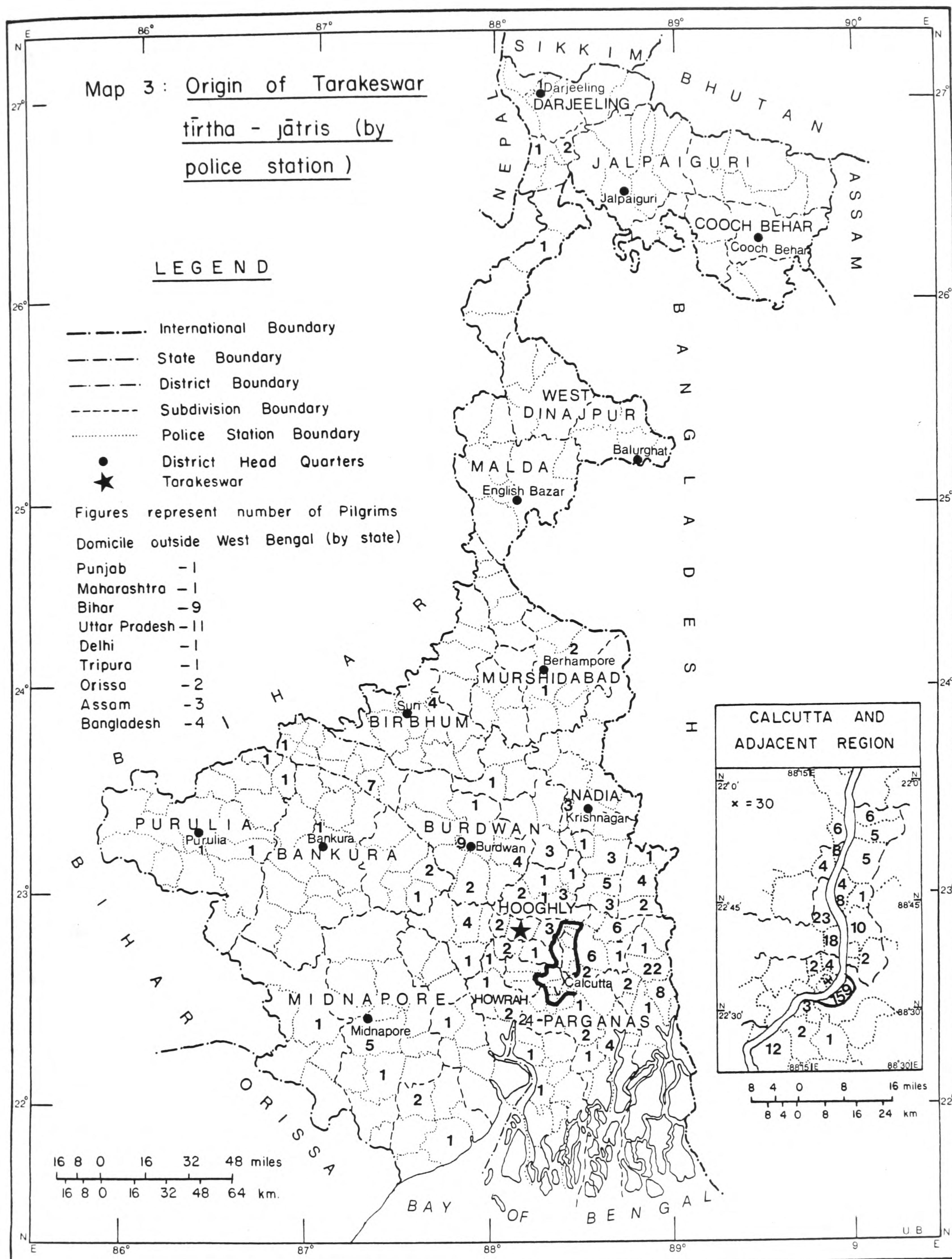
From October, 1977 to April, 1978, at various times, 513 pilgrims were interviewed at Tarakeswar. The results of these tīrtha-jātri interviews are tabulated in Appendix B. This section will be a brief discussion of the significant findings of the survey.

The overwhelming number of pilgrims to Tarakeswar are Bengali in origin, as revealed by the fact that 463, or 90.3%, claimed Bengali as their mother tongue. A majority of the 48 who claimed Hindi as their mother tongue are currently resident in West Bengal as part of the large Bihari population in the state. Those pilgrims attracted to the shrine from outside the state fell into two categories: Bengalis resident outside Bengal and non-Bengalis who stopped at Tarakeswar while travelling to Gaṅgā-sāgara or Calcutta. Of the interviewees, 480 stated that they resided in West Bengal (cf. Map 3). Thus Tarakes-

war is clearly revealed as a place of pilgrimage of regional significance, drawing people from many parts of West Bengal, but which is also visited by those from outside the region who are crossing regional boundaries to visit nationally important centres such as Gaṅgā-sāgara and Calcutta. Tarakeswar itself is not sufficiently renowned as a religious centre to generate strong attraction beyond the regional boundaries.

The pilgrim sample at Tarakeswar was found to contain a high proportion of upper caste pilgrims. There are no caste restrictions on who may offer worship at the Tarakeswar temple at present, yet the extremely low numbers of _jātris_ from castes of lower status likely indicates a residual effect of the days when temple-going was restricted to the higher castes. Brāhmaṇs constituted 22.6% of the sample while their proportion of the West Bengal population according to the 1941 Census is only 2.2% (see Appendix B, section 9, note). Conversely Bāgdis, a low status but numerous caste, were represented at Tarakeswar by only five pilgrims. Ten interviewees would only state 'scheduled caste', and another two '_harijan_', for the names of their castes. There were six who claimed their castes as Vaiṣṇava. Taken together, the four castes of recognised highest status -- Brāhmaṇ, Kāyastha, Kṣatriya and Vaidya -- made up 54.6% of the total sample (280). The middle-range castes (the _Nava-sākha_ castes plus some other clean castes) numbered 140 (27.3%) and the lower-status castes only 78 (15.2%).

Sect affiliation was firstly for the Śākta (92, 17.9%), followed by Śaiva (79, 15.4%) and then Vaiṣṇava (64, 12.5%). No pilgrims claimed to be Tantrics, perhaps in accord with the avowed secrecy of this cult. Five pilgrims claimed membership in groups owing allegiance to a living _guru_ rather than the cult of a deity and another four would not reveal their cult orientation.



Map 3: Origin of Tarakeswar tīrtha - jātris (by police station)
LEGEND
International Boundary
State Boundary
District Boundary
Subdivision Boundary
Police Station Boundary
District Head Quarters
Tarakeswar
Figures represent number of Pilgrims
Domicile outside West Bengal (by state)
Punjab - 1
Maharashtra - 1
Bihar - 9
Uttar Pradesh - 11
Delhi - 1
Tripura - 1
Orissa - 2
Assam - 3
Bangladesh - 4
SIKKIM
BHUTAN
NEPAL
ASSAM
BANGLADESH
BIHAR
ORISSA
BAY OF BENGAL
DARJEELING
Darjeeling
JALPAIGURI
Jalpaiguri
COOCH BEHAR
Cooch Behar
WEST DINAJPUR
Balurghat
MALDA
English Bazar
MURSHIDABAD
Berhampore
BIRBHUM
Suri
NADIA
Krishnagar
PURULIA
Purulia
BANKURA
Bankura
BURDWAN
Burdwan
HOOGHLY
HOWRAH
Calcutta
MIDNAPORE
Midnapore
24-PARGANAS
CALCUTTA AND ADJACENT REGION
x = 30
16 8 0 16 32 48 miles
16 8 0 16 32 48 64 km.
8 4 0 8 16 miles
8 4 0 8 16 24 km

The educational characteristics of the pilgrims were, on the whole, high, compared to state-wide figures (see Appendix B, section 18, note). Only 91 (17.7%) admitted to no education at all, while almost as many (72, 14%) claimed university degrees. It is possible that educational achievements were exaggerated by respondents, but more likely that there was a tendency for heads of pilgrim parties to come forward to be interviewed and a likely correlation between their responsibility, usually for the family, and their attainments in education. It can be noted here as well that 319 (62.2%) of the pilgrims lived in urban municipalities, and of them 159 were from Calcutta alone. This fact is also likely to have had an impact on educational characteristics in the sample. Only two pilgrims claimed traditional Sanskritic education.

The occupational characteristics of pilgrims to Tarakeswar again reveal the urban bias of the group. In the sample, 163 or 31.8%, were government employees (including police, firemen, bank employees, clerks, officers, electricity and railway workers, etc.), and another 120, or 23.4%, were employed in private businesses or industries. Therefore salaried workers constituted 55.2% of the breadwinners of families of pilgrims interviewed. Another 115 (22.4%) were self-employed in business and 29 (5.7%) were professionally qualified as lawyers, doctors, nurses, lecturers and school teachers. All of the above occupations are principally those of urban dwellers, and particularly from the middle-class stratum. Only 40 pilgrims (7.8%) claimed agriculture as the source of support for their families. To generalise, statistics on place of origin, education, caste and occupation indicate that the bulk of pilgrims to Tarakeswar are drawn from the urban, moderately well-educated, higher caste strata who are members of the middle and working class, employed either in business, government or private concerns.

The purposes of pilgrimage reveal a great deal about the pilgrimage institution and the diverse characteristics of the different places of pilgrimage. Of the sample, 56 (10.9%) claimed to be at Tarakeswar to make a vow,[1] and another 178 (34.7%) to fulfil a vow. The largest single reason for undertaking a vow was health reasons (19, 3.7%) with lesser proportions for those seeking a job, a son, a child, success in business or examinations, a raise in salary, the welfare of a child, a daughter's marriage, winning a court case and mental peace. A larger number of pilgrims come to fulfil rather than make vows as it is common to make a mental vow to the deity, promising fulfilment, usually by worship in the temple. Again health reasons are the most commonly stated reasons for fulfilling vows, with 72 pilgrims, or 14% of the sample, giving this response. Besides repetition of reasons given above for the making of vows, pilgrims stated the following as the object of the vow they were now fulfilling at Tarakeswar: for getting a house, ending a quarrel, for a cow's pregnancy, for the safe delivery of a child, for getting a lorry, for getting hair on the head, for the safe installation of a well and for the return of a lost relative.

Many of the purposes for vows recurred as reasons for pilgrimage of those who had not chosen to make vows. However, the majority in this category (63.3% of the 279) claimed to be approaching the deity simply to offer worship (pūjā) and to have a darśana of the deity. Others sought the general welfare of their family members and Bābā's blessings (āśis or āśīrvāda). The holding of the annaprāśana ceremony, when a child being weaned is given the prāsada of Bābā's bhoga as its first solid food, is

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[1]Vows (mānot) are mental contracts between pilgrim and deity in which the pilgrim promises to give an offering if the desired object is granted by the deity. Pilgrims are very clear on the mental contractual nature of their vows, which they describe as mānasika, conceived in the mind.

also an attempt to secure the welfare of the child. Only five pilgrims responded to this question by stating that devotion was the purpose of their pilgrimage, and two gave spiritual betterment as their motive. Not a few (17) sought the mental peace proferred by religion.

From the division of the pilgrims into those with and without vows it can be seen that the majority of pilgrims seek the general rewards of darśana and worship, but a considerable minority undertake contractual vows with the deity for the remedy or avoidance of specific earthly problems. The number of pilgrims who claimed other-worldly motives for their pilgrimage was negligible.

The means of fulfilment of vows and other rituals performed by pilgrims can be discussed together. In total, 412 (80.3%) of the pilgrims stated that they would definitely offer a pūjā to Bābā Tāraknātha. Another ten sought only darśana, while 16 (mainly on the night of Śivarātri) were only pouring Ganges water on the liṅga. Of those who made vows, 78.6% were planning to offer a pūjā in fulfilment of the vow. Others promised to offer their hair, a daṇḍi-katta (prostrating circumambulation of the temple), annaprāśana, milk, their own blood (cut from the breast), take temporary sannyāsi vows at Gajan time or carry Ganges water on foot from Seorophuli. This last act is performed more in the month of Śrāvaṇa than at the times of interviewing. A similarly high percentage of the pilgrims fulfilling vows (75.8% of 178) were also offering pūjā to the deity. Other practices undertaken for the fulfilment of vows not mentioned by those making vows were the offering of fingernails, the singing of devotional songs, the giving of a coconut or rice and the donation of money to the temple. While the majority of pilgrims who had no vows were simply offering a pūjā, others were reciting sacred texts or mantras (verses), performing daṇḍi-katta,

doing the annaprāśana of a child, offering hair, taking an amulet for a cure and other practices already mentioned above.

Of the pilgrims interviewed, 404 (78.7%) had visited Tarakeswar before. One claimed to come weekly, one at every full moon, and others monthly and annually (such as for every Śivarātri or Gajan). The totals for number of repeat visits declined steadily from one through five, but increased again at 'more than 5' because of the number of pilgrims who tried to come annually or semi-annually. It is interesting to note that the majority of returning jātris did not seek out the same purohit again on their subsequent visits and thus did not maintain a jajmāni relationship. Some pilgrims stated that they returned to the same nivāsa on every visit to Tarakeswar, where they felt comfortable, secure and known, and took whichever priest was available for their pūjā service.

The largest number of jātris claimed to have visited the temple last year (140, 27.3%). The numbers declined steadily as one moved towards more recent and past dates. A surprising number of pilgrims could not recall the time of their last pilgrimage to Tarakeswar, likely indicating that it fell in the not-recent past.

Pilgrims to Tarakeswar tend to come with their families in groups of two to six members. These travelling groups accounted for 303 (59.1%) of the total sample, with the most common groups being of three and four people. Those travelling alone accounted for 62 or 12.1% of the total. Almost as few were those travelling with friends: 78 or 15.2%. Combined friends (usually neighbours) and family groups accounted for 32 interviews, while two pilgrims were visiting Tarakeswar with organised tour groups.

(ii) Dharnā-jātris

Dharnā ('catching hold of'), also called hatya (sacrificing), is a characteristic ritual practice at Tarakeswar which has not been reported

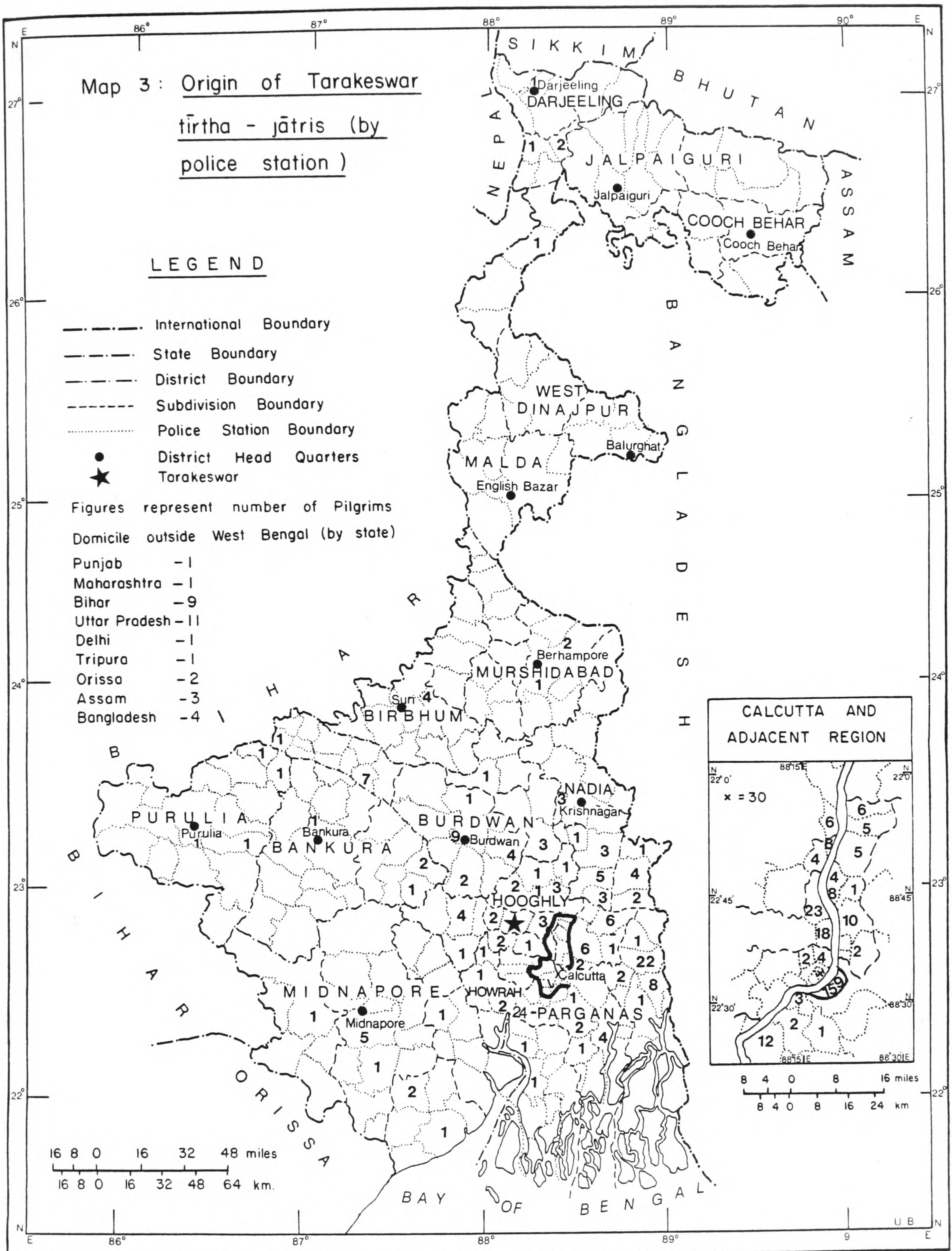
as occurring elsewhere in West Bengal. The central action of the pilgrim performing dharnā is to lie, fasting, before the shrine of the deity for as long as it may take for the deity to communicate the desired object to the pilgrim.[1] This severe form of austerity is undertaken most commonly in cases of persistent or incurable diseases, but for other reasons as well.[2] The deity in whose name one performs austerities is obligated to grant boons in return for the devotee's suffering, hence the notion of 'getting hold of' the deity by means of one's personal self-sacrifice. The mahanta described this type of religious ritual as kṛcchra sādhanā, i.e., a religious exercise of difficulty and effort. One dharnā-jātri interviewed had been giving dharnā for 22 days, surviving only on Bābā's caraṇāmṛta (which the dharnā-jātri is allowed to take after the fourth day), before receiving the adesa (divine prescription) from Bābā, informing him of the steps which he was to take to get his desired end. The ādeśa comes most frequently in a dream, in which Bābā appears to the pilgrim as a sannyāsi, a Brāhmaṇ or as Śiva[3] and gives an order which the pilgrim must obey. Very often the execution of the instructions will involve further difficulty for the pilgrim -- such as the eating of unsavoury things (e.g., a live frog, a snake, human excrement), fetching leaves from a tree filled with poisonous snakes, finding a rare item, etc. -- which test the devotee's faith. It is said by priests, the temple diwan and some dharnā-jātris

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[1]The word dharnā is from the root dhṛ: to hold, to bear, to carry.

[2]The seriousness of the ailments of some dharnā-jātris is evident on seeing them. One woman died in December, 1977, while giving dharnā.

[3]One woman being interviewed, having fasted for a week, asked my research assistant if he was a Brāhmaṇ. When he answered yes, she was certain that he was Bābā come to give her the ādeśa. The more he denied it, the more persistent she became, since his denial seemed to her to be testing her faith. Ashok finally had to give her an interviewing form as a token of her 'darśana' of Bābā, with which she hoped to find her cure.


Map 3 : Origin of Tarakeswar tīrtha - jātris (by police station)
LEGEND
International Boundary
State Boundary
District Boundary
Subdivision Boundary
Police Station Boundary
District Head Quarters
Tarakeswar
Figures represent number of Pilgrims
Domicile outside West Bengal (by state)
Punjab - 1
Maharashtra - 1
Bihar - 9
Uttar Pradesh - 11
Delhi - 1
Tripura - 1
Orissa - 2
Assam - 3
Bangladesh - 4
SIKKIM
BHUTAN
NEPAL
ASSAM
BANGLADESH
BIHAR
ORISSA
BAY OF BENGAL
DARJEELING
Darjeeling
JALPAIGURI
Jalpaiguri
COOCH BEHAR
Cooch Behar
WEST DINAJPUR
Balurghat
MALDA
English Bazar
MURSHIDABAD
Berhampore
BIRBHUM
Suri
NADIA
Krishnagar
BURDWAN
Burdwan
PURULIA
Purulia
BANKURA
Bankura
HOOGHLY
HOWRAH
Calcutta
24-PARGANAS
MIDNAPORE
Midnapore
CALCUTTA AND ADJACENT REGION
x = 30
16 8 0 16 32 48 miles
16 8 0 16 32 48 64 km.
8 4 0 8 16 miles
8 4 0 8 16 24 km
U.B.

that only 35% of dharnā-jātris receive the ādeśa because the majority do not have sufficient faith. And of these 35%, only a lesser number can expect to pass the tests of faith once the ādeśa is received. In this way a low incidence of cure or remission from serious illness is accounted for by attributing the causes of failure to the impure faith of the devotee.

Persons wishing to give dharnā will arrive in Tarakeswar on the day before they intend commencing their vigil. On that day they take only vegetarian food. They spend the night in a lodge, several of which are preferred by dharnā-jātris. Most often (in 48 cases of the 74 in our sample) the jātri is alone. For a fixed fee of Rs.17, the owner of the lodging house, in conjunction with a purohit (all of whom will do this work), will provide all requisites for giving dharnā: the Rs.3 fee to the temple, daily pūjā in the morning and evening for as long as the pilgrim continues to give dharnā, lodging for the night before and after the dharnā, and the fee of a barber who chips the fingernail of the smallest finger (right for a man, left for a woman) of the pilgrim on the day his dharnā starts. That day the pilgrim prepares himself a meal of haviṣya after the bhoga pūjā which is the last food to touch his lips until day five, when he is allowed to drink Bābā's caraṇāmṛta. By 5 P.M. on the first day he takes his place in the nāṭa-mandira before the temple. He is allowed to speak, but should do so sparingly. He can have only two sets of simple clothes to be worn alternately, and one blanket. A dharnā-jātri is not allowed to touch or be touched by another person. Dharnā is prohibited to a menstruating woman, a person in birth or death pollution, in cases of leprosy and tuberculosis and when a dream is received by the pilgrim which indicates Bābā's displeasure with his performance of the ritual.

After 4 or 5 days, most jātris who are likely to receive the ādeśa have

already done so, and therefore few remain beyond this time. They are encouraged to give it up at this point by their priest, who sees his profit dwindling since he must meet the expenses of each successive day's pūjā out of the pilgrim's fixed payment.

The number of dharnā-jātris is unevenly distributed throughout the year. The register[1] kept at the temple office shows the following monthly breakdown for dharnā-jātris in 1976-77:

Month	Number
Śrāvaṇa (July-August)	102
Bhādra	92
Aśvin	140
Kārtika	159
Agrahāyana	85
Pauṣa	36
Māgha	43
Phālguna	138
Caitra	71
Vaiśākha	165
Jyaiṣṭha	148
Āṣāḍha (June-July	138
Total	1317

These figures show a decline in the number of pilgrims giving dharnā in the cold winter months, when lying out in the open-sided nāṭa-mandira on the cold marble floor with only one blanket would be too severe an austerity. The dip in numbers in Caitra month is accounted for by the preference of pilgrims to take the vows of sannyāsa in that month, rather

[1]Regarding such registers and their importance for social history, See Goswamy (1966).

than give dharnā.

The number of pilgrims giving dharnā varies greatly from year to year. In 1972-73, the office registered 1012 dharnā-jātris in the twelve month period (from Śrāvaṇa to Āṣāḍha). The following year the total rose to 1825, but the next year fell to 874. One old register for 11½ months in 1934-35 contains 3196 entries, confirming the information of priests and temple administrators that the number of dharnā-jātris was previously much greater than today.

Reviewing the statistical findings (Appendix B),[1] we can note that dharnā-jātris are more likely to be female (54.1%), from rural areas (55.4%) and deriving sustenance from agriculture or small businesses (23% and 27% respectively), rather than from salaried employment. As one would expect from a sample in India with a high proportion of women and rural residents, educational qualifications in this group are lower than for the ordinary pilgrims, with 68.9% having less than Class VII standing. Caste figures show a lesser representation of pilgrims from high caste groups (33.8%) and a proportionate increase in middle-ranked caste groups (47.3%) while lower caste groups remain poorly represented (14.9%). Health reasons predominate as motives for giving dharnā (74.3%), with economic problems of increased significance. A meaningful difference between dharnā-jātris and other pilgrims to Tarakeswar is the claim of 54 (73%) to be oriented to a cult of Hinduism. This reflects the high degree of religious involvement of those undertaking dharnā, and the focus of that faith on Śiva (25, 33.8%)

[1]Chakrabarti (1976a:166) has sketched some characteristics of dharnā jātris in an article, but his findings are of dubious reliability because he did not interview pilgrims but drew all his information from the temple register. It is well known that dharnā-jātris will register themselves falsely to the temple, usually in order to hide the seriousness of their ailment or to preserve secrecy over their vow until it is completed. Personal interviewing revealed discrepancies in the temple register. Furthermore those keeping the register are not very concerned with details such as caste and place of domicile, and so inaccuracies cropped up frequently.

The key fact which accounts for the differences between dharnā-jātris and the other tīrtha-jātris is the fact that dharnā-jātris are more likely to be rural people. This fact accounts for much because rural people would have less access to the medical facilities available to town-dwellers, and would therefore be more likely to take recourse to religion for cures of their ailments. Furthermore, fewer being salaried employees, they would find it possible to absent themselves from home, farm or business for the minimal four days and often longer required for dharnā. It can also be postulated, although no measure was used here, that the more extreme faith demanded of those giving dharnā is less likely to be possessed by the sophisticated, western-influenced, modernised, more highly educated town dwellers than the people of the rural villages.



Navadvip: Pilgrims crossing the Ganges

(Mayapur in the Background)

CHAPTER V

NAVADVIP

The town of Navadvip, in the Nadia District of West Bengal, is the most sacred place in Bengal for the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. It was here that Śrī Caitanya, avatāra of the supreme Bhagavat Kṛṣṇa, appeared on earth and instigated the devotional revival which produced the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava cult. Although the town pre-dates his birth in 1486 A.D., it is because of Caitanya that Navadvip has its present status as a place of pilgrimage.

Navadvip (also known as Nabadwip, Nadia and Nadiya) is located at 23°24'N. and 88°25'E., on the west bank of the Bhāgīrathī (Ganges) River opposite the confluence of the Jalangi River. It is about 65 miles north of Calcutta, to which it is connected by road, river and rail (from both the Howrah and Sealdah Stations). Besides its religious importance, Navadvip is a large trading centre and is a regional centre for the hand-loom cloth industry. It is a thana headquarters and a seat of both secular and religious learning. The population of the town according to the 1971 census was 94,204.

The municipal town of Navadvip takes in only part of the area which the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas revere as sacred. The name of the town is generally ascribed to the historical existence in that area of nine contiguous islands, hence nava (nine) - dvīpa (islands),[1] of which the town is one. Navadvip is different from either Tarakeswar or Tarapith in that the sacred zone

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[1]The District Gazeteer of 1910 (p.179) suggests two alternative derivations of the name Navadvip: navya-dvīpa (new island) and nava-dīpa (nine lights). Both are less likely than 'nine islands' and the latter has become the accepted interpretation of the name. Monier-Williams (1964:530) repeats the 'new island' derivation. The proper spelling of the name is Navadvīpa.

is a relatively large geographical area, in which there are many foci of devotional activity, rather than a single temple of overriding importance (Map 5). Caitanya was born and performed līlā in Navadvip, and by so doing invested the entire area with his sanctity. Or, to phrase this idea within the concepts of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, the sacred location (dhāma) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa has descended from its celestial form, taking an earthly manifestation, to accompany the incarnation of Kṛṣṇa as Śrī Caitanya. Navadvip is, in fact, commonly referred to as Navadvip Dhāma (or Dham), for example in the name of its railway station, or even more respectfully as simply Śrī Dhāma ('the respected place'). The area of the nine islands is frequently called Gaura-maṇḍala, the circle[1] of Gaurā (i.e., Caitanya).

a. The Foundation Narrative

(i) The Story[2]

The origin of Navadvip's renown as a place of pilgrimage is not so much a legend as an historical event invested with religious significance. The historicity of Caitanya is well documented and incontestable. His elevation by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas to the status of avatāra of Kṛṣṇa is the source of the significance of his life.

Navadvip was supposedly founded in 1063 A.D. by the Sena dynasty of Hindu rulers, according to 'Ain-i-akbarī.[3] It was the capital of Bengal

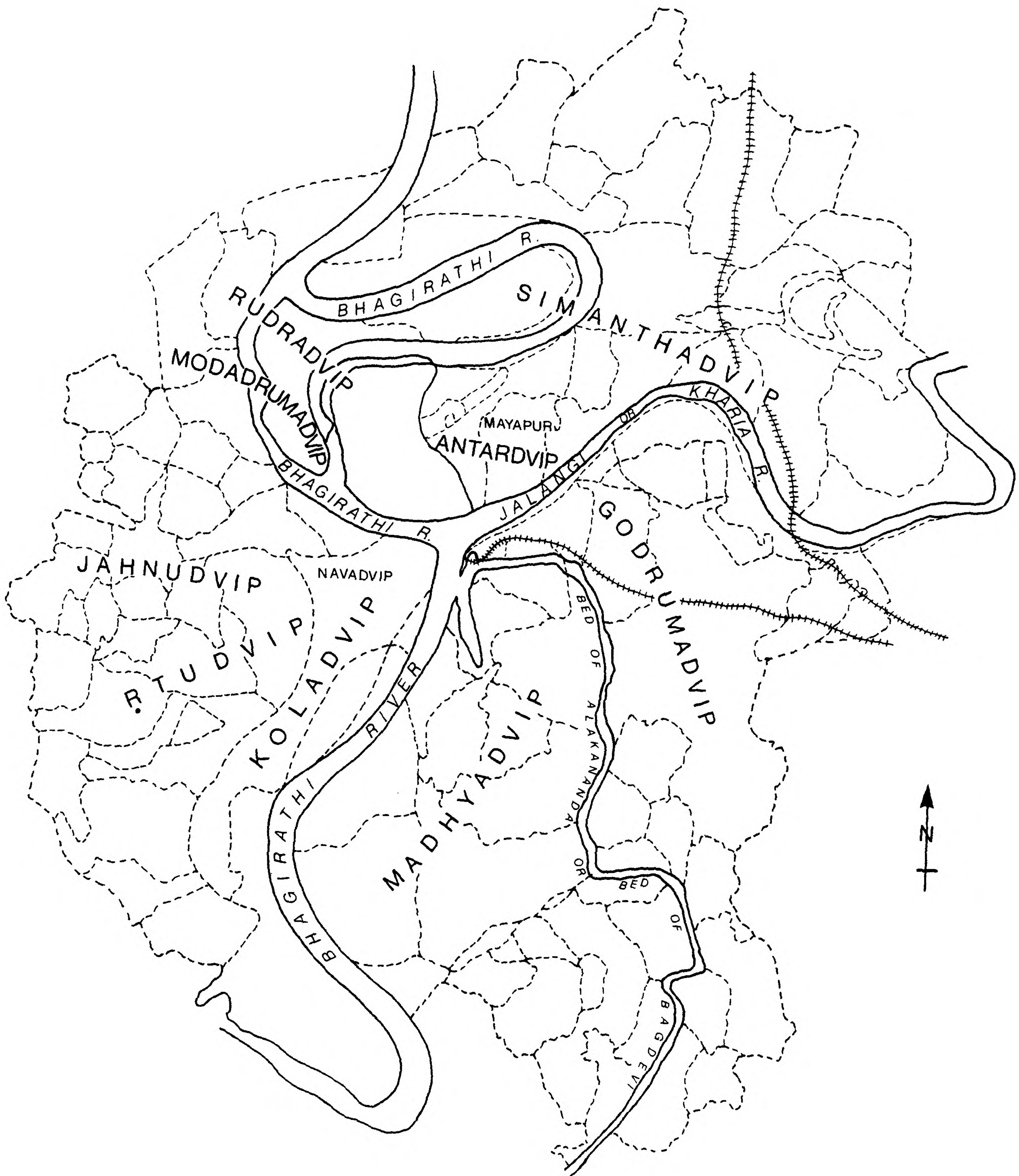
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[1]Maṇḍala conveys a sense of both a 'circle' and the meaningful ordering of religious geometry; the Gaura-maṇḍala is both a geographical area and a symbolic maṇḍala (see Figure 1).

[2]Sources for the history of Navadvip are Garett (1910:179-85), Majumdar (1969:88), Sanyal (1933:217-32) and Tirtha (1943:6-7); in Bengali: Chakravarti (1909), Mallika (1911), Datta and Datta (1937) and Kunda (1977); much detail came from informants as well.

[3]Gladwin, Francis (trans.), Ayeen Akbery of Abul Fazl Allami, The Indian Publication Society, Calcutta, 1783, 310-11.

MAP 5: THE GAURA - MAṆḌALA



under Lakṣmaṇasena, and was the first target of attack when Muhammad Bakhtiar Khilji invaded and captured Bengal in 1202 A.D. Lakṣmaṇasena fled, Navadvip was destroyed, and Bengal passed under Muslim rule.[1]

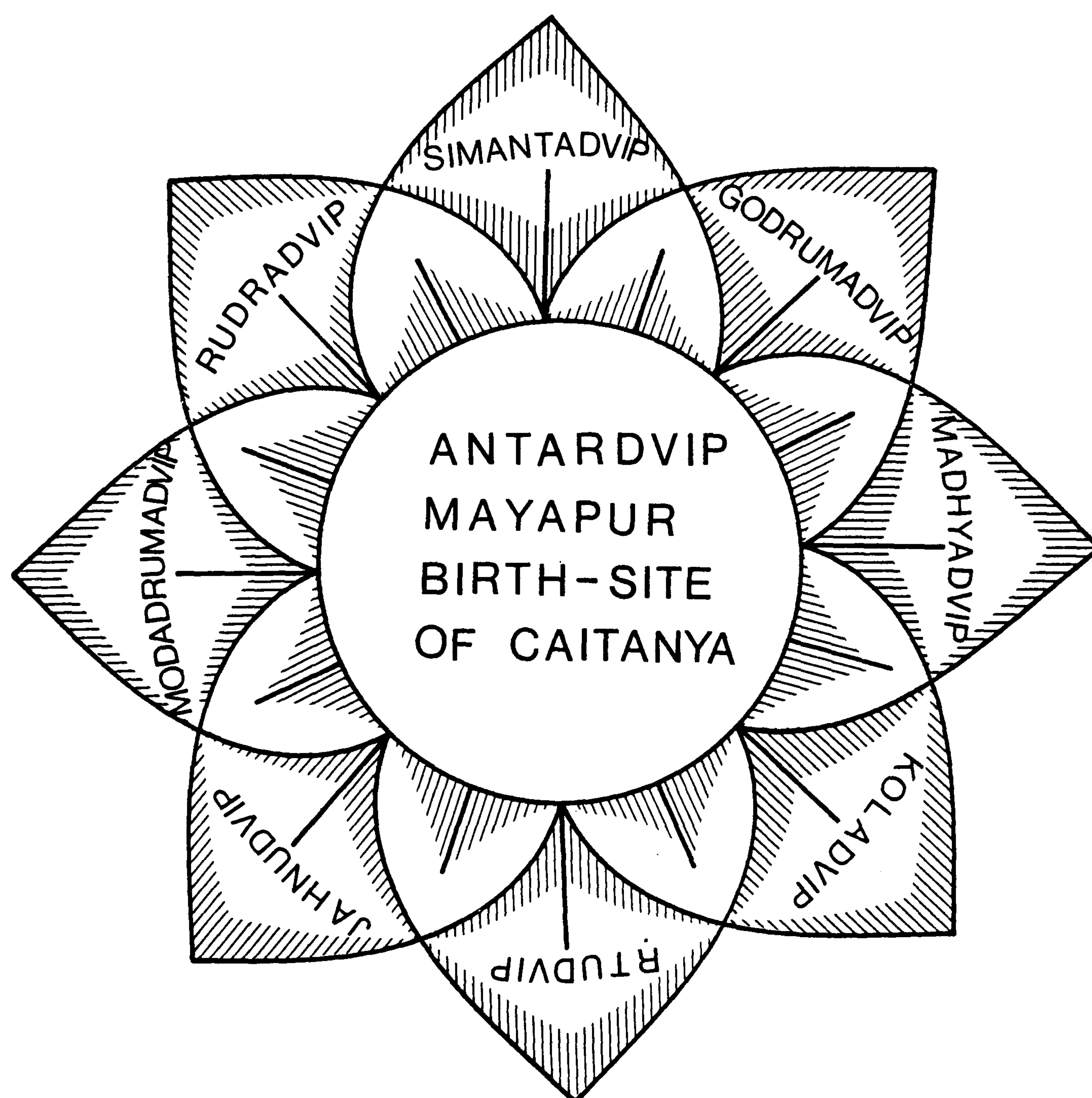
The religious importance of Navadvip emerged with the transference of the centre of navya-nyāya philosophy from Mithila to Navadvip. This 'new logic' burgeoned in the 15th century. Navadvip became famous as a seat of medieval Sanskritic learning -- both nyaya and smṛti (Hindu social and religious laws) -- which resulted in its becoming a stronghold of orthodox formalist Brāhmaṇism. These features "created an arid and intellectual atmosphere, highly materialistic, narrow, proud and even sceptical" (De 1961:30). De goes on to remark on the "self-satisfied formalism of the orthodox Smārta system, which prescribed religious and absolving efficacy to a somewhat mechanical observance of fixed duties and ceremonies." It was onto this scene that Caitanya entered with a wave of ecstatic devotion.

The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas maintain that there has been a supreme avatāra for each of the four ages of man. Kṛṣṇa of Vṛndāvana was the avatāra of the Dvāpara-yuga (age), and Caitanya that of the present Kālī-yuga. The stories that have been passed down regarding the birth and childhood of Caitanya cannot be considered a factual historical record because the actual history of the life of Caitanya has been treated to a process of mythologisation in the 500 years since his death, particularly involving the incorporation of elements of the mythology of the young Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana as

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[1]The invasion of Navadvip by Muhammad Bhaktiar Khilji is described in the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī of Maulānā Minhāj-ud-din Abū-Umar-i-Usmān. Some genealogical accounts place the capital of Bengal in Navadvip during the time of Lakṣmaṇasena's predecessor Vallālasena; cf. Rajesh Chandra Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, G. Bharadwaj, Calcutta, 1971, pp.259, 247n.

FIGURE 1 : THE GAURA - MAṆḌALA CONCEIVED AS A LOTUS (after Tirtha 1947 : 6)



described in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.[1]

Stories about the coming of Caitanya suggest that Kṛṣṇa took incarnation in Navadvip at the behest of several upright religious men of the town, who were disconcerted by the arid religiosity of the times and the friction which existed between Hindus and Muslims. Alternately, it is said that Kṛṣṇa took birth as Caitanya in order to experience the sweet emotion (rasa) of devotion which Rādhā felt for him in Vṛndāvana. Caitanya is believed to have been Kṛṣṇa within, acting the part (bhāva) of Rādhā. The notion of the joint avatāra is one of the differentiating features of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and is put forth as a reason for the special holiness of Navadvip.[2]

Caitanya was born into the home of Jagannātha Miśra, a Brāhmaṇ scholar with Vaiṣṇava tendencies, and his devout wife Śacī. At birth Caitanya was given the name Viśvaṃbhara, but was affectionately called Nimāi because he was born near a nim[3] tree. His personal charm and beauty, or perhaps fair complexion, earned him the epithets of Gaurā and Gaurāṅga (golden). He was the second son, the elder, Viśvarūpa, having taken ascetic vows and left home. For fear that the younger boy should follow his elder brother in abandoning the family, Nimāi was denied education until his later childhood. Although stories exist which glorify his scholastic abilities, showing him defeating the great scholars of his time in debate, these events are likely

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[1]Sources for the life of Caitanya are Tirtha (1947:14-18), Kennedy (1925:13-51), De (1961:67-102), Majumdar (1969:91-248), Sen (1917), Sinha (1976) and Raychaudhuri (1953:80-106). An especially important early source is the Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇa-dāsa Kavirāja (N. K. Ray (trans.) 1959). There are numerous secondary sources in Bengali, most of a devotional kind.

[2]The Sahajiyā sub-group of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas tells the story of Caitanya somewhat differently; cf. Dimock (1966:146ff.)

[3]Sanskrit nimba, the Azadirachta indica.

fictitious. Caitanya's most reliable biographer, Murāri Gupta,[1] does not indicate that the boy showed signs of divinely-inspired brilliance in his childhood. His education was confined to grammar with smatterings of literature and rhetoric, and at an early age, following the death of his father, he shouldered the responsibilities of the household. He married and, when his first wife Lakṣmi died, he took Viṣṇupriyā ('darling of Viṣṇu'), daughter of a Navadvip scholar named Sanātana Miśra, as his wife. Viśvaṃbhara set himself up as a conventional learned Brāhmaṇ, teaching grammar to students of his own Sanskrit _ṭol_ (school).

The transformation from grammarian and householder to cult preceptor began with Viśvaṃbhara's trip to Gayā to perform the funerary rites (_śrāddha_) of his father. He was 22 years old at the time, and what took place at Gayā is not fully known. It appears that he received initiation at the hands of Īśvara Purī, a _sannyāsi_, but this hardly accounts for the state in which he returned to Navadvip. He came back careless of his personal life, his scholarship and his duties as a householder. He was swept away in god-intoxication, as if mad with a vision of Kṛṣṇa. He wept and swooned and fell into trances, shouting the name of Kṛṣṇa. He soon became the centre of a small group of Vaiṣṇava devotees who saw in him something more divine than mad. For one year the frenzy of devotion continued, with nightly _kīrtana_ (devotional singing) and increasing fame for Viśvaṃbhara. At the end of that year, he took formal initiation as a _sannyāsi_ from Keśava Bhāratī, and assumed the name Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya. _Caitanya_ literally means living force, or consciousness, hence the full name can be taken to mean Kṛṣṇa-consciousness, an appropriate name for the perfect devotee.

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[1]The biography of Caitanya, _Śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya-caritāmṛta_, was written by this older contemporary, fellow student and associate of Caitanya. It was most recently published by Mrinal Kanti Ghosh, Amrita Bazar Patrika Office, Calcutta, 1921 (cf. De 1961:35).

The leader of the group of men who formed around Caitanya was an older man named Advaita. The congregation was soon joined by Nityānanda whom Caitanya welcomed as a brother. The devotees would meet daily at the house of Śrīvāsa. These three, joined later by a fourth -- Gadādhara -- were the four principal Navadvip disciples of Caitanya and, together with him, they constituted the pañca-tattva (five principles) of the Navadvip circle of devotees.[1]

Caitanya decided to pass his days in holy Vṛndāvana, but was prevailed upon by his mother and wife to go instead to the not-so-distant holy city of Puri, in Orissa. This he did, and spent the rest of his life in Puri, except for long pilgrimages to the south, west and north of India. In Puri he continued to practise and preach his Hari-nāma (name of Kṛṣṇa) doctrine, and so won many Orissans to his sect. His devotees from Navadvip visited him annually on the occasion of the great Car Festival (Ratha-yātrā) of the deity Jagannātha at Puri, and so continued to draw inspiration from him for the propagation of Kṛṣṇa-devotion in Bengal. Caitanya settled permanently at Puri at about age 30. From then until his death in 1533 A.D. at the age of 48, his life was filled with the madness of divine love, or as De puts it, "an orgy of devotional passion" (1961:102).

Following the death of Caitanya, the work which he had done was picked up by the remaining members of the pañca-tattva, and by the six preceptors

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[1]The unity of the pañca-tattva as avatāras and parts of Kṛṣṇa himself is expressed in the following invocation:

> I bow to Lord Kṛṣṇa, who appears as a devotee (Lord Caitanya himself), as His personal expansion (Śrī Nityānanda), His Incarnation (Śrī Advaita), His devotee (Śrī Śrivāsa) and His energy (Śrī Gadādhara), and who is the source of strength for the devotees.
>
> (Acyutānanda Svami 1974:7).

of the cult[1] whom Caitanya had sent to Vṛndāvana to work on his behalf. Their organising efforts -- directed both to systematising the personal spiritual inspiration of Caitanya and to creating the functional structure of the cult -- brought about the institutionalisation of his teachings and practices and gave them the form which has allowed the cult to survive 500 years to the present day.

The nature of Caitanya, as perceived by his followers, will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. It remains, now, to look at the relationship between the preceptor of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and his līlā-bhūmi, that is, between Navadvip-candra[2] and Navadvip.

(ii) Analysis of the Narrative

Navadvip is equal to Vṛndāvana because Caitanya is identical with Kṛṣṇa. Navadvip is thus invested with the glory of Kṛṣṇa's celestial playground. The glorification of Navadvip receives its ultimate expression in the Śrī Śrī Navadvip-dhāma Māhātmya of Kedarnātha Datta:[3]

> What a pilgrim obtains by visiting all of the places of pilgrimage,
> The same can be obtained by remembering Navadvip, the scriptures say,
> He who visits and sees Navadvip,
> Attains the love of Kṛṣṇa in every birth,
> He who goes to Navadvip, even for the purpose of work,
> He no longer suffers future human births.
> In every step of moving in Navadvip,
> He gets the fruit of a crore {10,000,000} of sacrifices,
> the offering of a horse, the scriptures say.

This because Navadvip was the līlā-bhūmi of Caitanya.

---

[1]These are the six Gosvāmins of Vṛndāvana, the principal theologians of the cult. There are also less important leaders of the spread of the devotionalism of Caitanya after his death -- the eight kavirājas and 64 mahantas -- all of whom along with the pañca-tattva and other direct disciples and their families, totalling 177 revered individuals, are celebrated in an annual offering of bhoga in Navadvip; see also Risley (1892:343-44).

[2]Navadvip-candra is an epithet of Caitanya which means 'the moon of Navadvip'. The moon is associated with Kṛṣṇa.

[3]Quoted in G. G. Goswamy (ed.), Tīrthasāra Śrī-dhāma Navadvīpa Māhātmya, G. C. Pal, Calcutta, n.d., p.6.

The import of the story of the advent of Caitanya in Navadvip is contained in the doctrine of the avatāra which has already been encountered in previous chapters. To understand the sacredness of Navadvip, it is sufficient to know that it was the place of līlā of a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa, and so is eternally the place of residence of that avatāra, although the subtle form of the deity will not be perceptible to the majority of devotees. The dust which touched Caitanya's feet and the water of the Ganges in which he bathed are believed to retain his sacredness.[1]

The actual place of birth of Caitanya is not known with certainty. The Ganges is said to have changed its course through Navadvip several times, and so may have obliterated the original birthplace. This has made room for disagreement over the true birthplace, and at present two sites vie for the honour: Prācīna (ancient) Mayapur, located adjacent to the town of Navadvip; and Mayapur, situated across the river. Both villages have been the subject of long tracts, quoting historical, geographical and archeological evidence to show that Caitanya was born in one or the other village. The two places are at odds because Prācīna Mayapur is honoured by the orthodox priestly Goswamy families of Navadvip, who control worship in much of the town, while Mayapur is the centre of several groups of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas which have recently increased in importance and which have their own followers independent of the Goswamys.

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[1]Although Śiva is considered to be the source of the Ganges in most references, frequently being depicted in iconography with the river spouting from his sacred locks, the Vaiṣṇavas maintain that the Ganges flows from the feet of Kṛṣṇa, and so is a river of caraṇāmṛta (cf. Tirtha 1947:102). The Bhāgīrathī (Ganges) at Navadvip is frequently called Gaura (i.e., Caitanya) Gaṅgā by residents and pilgrims of Navadvip. The Vaiṣṇavas believe that a river of rasa runs through heavenly Vṛndāvana, and that the Ganges of Navadvip is an earthly manifestation of that river (cf. Dimock 1966:168).

Principal among the latter are the Gauḍīya Sarasvat Maṭha and the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (ISKCON), whose western devotees are a common sight in Navadvip and Mayapur. The claims of Mayapur to being Caitanya's birthplace are recent (within the last 80 years), but the strength and wealth of the Mayapur-based groups touting their centre has created considerable popular support for their claim, judging from the large volume of pilgrims who include a visit to Mayapur in their pilgrimage to Navadvip.

The area of the Gaura-maṇḍala is a roughly circular tract with a circumference of 32 miles. The centre of the area is said to be either Navadvip or Mayapur, around which are spread nine islands. Pilgrims attempt to visit all nine islands (although many do not visit all), following a prescribed order: Antardvip, Simanthadvip, Godrumadvip, Madhyadvip, Koladvip, Ṛtudvip, Jahnudvip, Modadrumadvip and Rudradvip. Historical sites associated with Caitanya, his intimates and many Vaiṣṇava holy men are scattered throughout the entire area. The whole of Gaura-maṇḍala is sometimes conceptualised as taking the shape of a sacred lotus bloom (e.g., Tirtha 1947:6 (Figure 1) and several informants), with Antardvip as the pericarp or whorl and the other eight islands as petals. It is further asserted that each part of this lotus represents a form of devotional practice: hearing (Simantadvip), chanting (Godrumadvip), meditating (Madhyadvip), serving the Lord's feet (Koladvip), worshipping (Ṛtudvip), greeting (Jahnudvip), serving as a faithful servant (Modadrumadvip), friendship (Rudradvip) and complete resignation and self-surrender (Antardvip). This symbolism is more textual than popular, and would not be known to the majority of pilgrims, but inasmuch as it makes a direct association between the various practices of <u>bhakti</u> and the sacred geography of the <u>tīrtha</u>, it reflects the emphasis placed by learned Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas on

devotion, including in matters related to pilgrimage.

That Navadvip was made sacred by Caitanya is expressed in the frequently heard image of his planting a tree at Navadvip. This tree is encountered in the Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Chapter ix):

> ...he accepted the duty of the planter. And he began the work of growing a fruit garden at Navadvip.
>
> The planter Sri Chaitanya brought the Bhakti-Kalpa-tree[1] and planted the same on the earth. He sprinkled on it the water of his will....
>
> The seed blossomed forth and got nourished in the shape of Sri Iswara Puri. The planter Sri Chaitanya himself developed into its main trunk.
>
> By his inscrutable power he became the trunk himself, while being the planter. That trunk is the mainstay of all the branches.
>
> (Kavirāja 1959:122-23)

The various disciples of Caitanya -- the branches of the tree -- are then enumerated. This tree is said by the champions of Mayapur to stand (invisibly) at the centre of their village: "In the eyes of devotees, Sridham Mayapur is the unparalleled, ever-fresh lovely Garden bearing in its bosom the Wish-Yielding Tree of Transcendental Love and Knowledge"[2] (Tirtha 1947:7). This representation places Navadvip at the historic and cultic centre of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. The cult branches out from Navadvip. The tree which is Caitanya can also be identified symbolically with the Cosmic tree or the axis mundi, a notion in keeping with the fact that this cult preceptor is held to be the supreme spirit of the universe, and is hence axial to Creation.

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[1]The wish-fulfilling tree of heaven.

[2]Song 3 below also refers to this tree, comparing Caitanya to it and saying that his nature is even greater than that of this great tree.

Since the sacredness of Navadvip derives from its being a place of <u>līlā</u>, it is the actual (or reputed) sites of <u>līlā</u>-activities in the town which are the focus of the attention of pilgrims. The entire <u>dhāma</u> is sacred, but shrines and temples have been raised at certain places in commemoration of particular acts of Caitanya and his disciples. It is said that a visitor to Navadvip learns all of the stories of Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa simply by completing his <u>parikramā</u> (circumambulation) of the <u>dhāma</u>.

It must be noted as well that, despite the importance which Navadvip holds for the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, its historical position as a centre of Brāhmaṇism and Tantra has resulted in the presence in the town of a great number of temples to various gods and goddesses besides the Vaiṣṇava. Most pilgrims encountered during fieldwork had come to Navadvip because of its <u>māhātmya</u> (glory) as a Vaiṣṇava place, but a minority did come on pilgrimage to Navadvip because of its non-Vaiṣṇava shrines, and its location on the sacred Ganges River.

b. The Deity

Singing the glory of the <u>Bhagavat</u>, especially as Kṛṣṇa, is one of the most commonly practised forms of Vaiṣṇava devotion. The <u>kīrtana</u>,[1] usually accompanied by drums and cymbals, is part of almost every Vaiṣṇava gathering. At the Śrī Pātbāṛī Āśrama in Baranagar near Calcutta, the <u>kīrtana</u> has been continuously going on, sung by shifts of singers, since 1926. Kennedy (1925:204) tells of one village which Caitanya visited and promised to return to, in which the <u>kīrtana</u> which was started up on

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[1]<u>Kīrtana</u> can be of three varieties: singing and dancing in celebration of Kṛṣṇa-<u>līlā</u>, repetitive singing of the names of the deity, and singing and dancing in public processions.

that day almost 500 years ago has not ceased, waiting for his return.

The lyrics of the kīrtana songs take many forms.[1] It was not until well after the death of Caitanya that he himself was glorified as the object of kīrtana devotion, when his identification as an avātara was accepted. Present practice includes songs of devotion to Caitanya as well as Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa (in many forms and by different names).[2]

(i) Songs and Image

Song 1. O matchless līlā of Gaurāṅga!
He went to bathe in the Suradhunī,[3]
his mind in the bhāva of Rādhā.
He was staring fixedly into the black waters,
and saw his reflection there.
Something angry in his heart said:
"He is two-faced, is my blue-complexioned lover,[4]
and is flirting with another."
And, furious, he went home,
so says Harirāma-dāsa {the author}.

Song 2. Come, let us go to see Gaurā in all his beauty,
the wonderful form of Gaurā, in Nadīyā city.[5]
His body glistens like liquid gold,
and who can look, unmoved, on the waves (of tears) which
flow from his eyes,
or on his arms, columns of gold reaching to his knees,[6]
or on the cloth, the colour of dawn, around his waist,
or on the garland of jasmine, hanging to his feet, swinging,
Vāsu[7] says: come, let us worship the living God.

---

[1] cf. Dimock 1958.

[2] The first three songs which follow have been translated from the Bengali by Edward C. Dimock (1958:153-69). The fourth song is from the translation by Acyutānanda Svami (1974). Other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava devotional lyrics are available in Edward C. Dimock and Denise Levertov (trans.), In Praise of Krishna: Songs from the Bengali, Anchor Books, Garden City, N.Y., 1967, and Edward J. Thompson and A.M. Spencer, Bengali Religious Lyrics: Vaishnava, The Association Press, Calcutta, 1925.

[3] The river which flows from heaven. Here, of course, the Ganges.

[4] Kṛṣṇa.

[5] Navadvip.

[6] A mark of beauty.

[7] The poet, Vāsudeva Ghoṣ.

Song 3 To what can I compare the philosopher's stone---[1]
whatever it touches becomes gold...
But (at the touch) of my Gaurāṅga, his dancing and singing,
men have become jewels.
Śacī's son is vanamālī.[2]
In the three worlds, there is nothing to compare to him---
to Gaurā, dear to my heart.
The moon of the sky seems stained, nor does it shine like my Gaurā,
that stainless moon over Nadīyā,
which drives the darkness of the mind away.
The scent of his body is yet more sweet than (that of) that heavenly tree
from which whatever one asks he will receive.
(My Gaurā) gives, throughout the world, (even) to him who does not ask,
spontaneously, of his wealth of love.
Comparable to Gaurā (can only be) Gaurā himself---
of this, any man may be the judge.
The mind of Paramānanda[3] is in agony;
when will Gaurā grant his mercy (unto me)?

Song 4 When, oh when, will I chant on the bank of the Ganges in the land of Navadvīpa?
Oh Rādhā, O Kṛṣṇa, when will I wander among the creepers and trees
with tears in my eyes and forget my bodily comforts?
When will I be satisfied by taking some food
from the untouchable men who live here and there
and by drinking the water of the Sarasvatī?
When will I roll to and fro on the banks of the river,
raising an uproar of "Kṛṣṇa! Kṛṣṇa!"
When will I bow down to the inhabitants of the holy place of Navadvīpa
and obtain a bit of their mercy?
When will I wear the dress of the paramahaṁsas[4]
and wear the dust of the feet of the Vaiṣṇavas on my body?
When will I see the inhabitants of Navadvīpa as nondifferent
from the inhabitants of Vrindāvana,

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[1]Lit. "touch-stone": parasa-mani.

[2]"Wearing a garland of forest-flowers": an epithet of Kṛṣṇa.

[3]The author, probably Paramānanda-dāsa.

[4]The highest stage of asceticism; cf. Ghurye 1964:28ff.

and when shall I become a Vrajavāsī,[1] too?
When will I see the true form of the transcendental realm
opening before my eyes,
and when will I attain the service of Śrī Rādhārāṇi?[2]



গৌর নিতাই

Gaura-nitai

(Caitanya and Nityānanda)

---

[1] An inhabitant of Vṛndāvana.

[2] The author is Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.

(ii) Analysis of the Songs and Image

Songs 1, 2 and 3 are all of the Bengali literary form known as pada. All are in the bhāva of Rādhā, that is, with the devotee adopting the devotional attitude of the lover longing for her beloved. The first song is one in which the devotee is piqued in jealousy, the second song is of a type which describes the joy of the lover meeting her beloved, while the third recalls the pleasure of the past.[1] The fourth song is of the siddhi-lālasā genre. Lālasā means 'to hanker in great expectation' and siddhi means 'perfection' hence this song relates the devotee's longing after his spiritual perfection (Acyutānanda Svami 1974:40). The picture is one sold to pilgrims in the streets of Navadvip. It depicts Caitanya together with his closest disciple, Nityānanda, in an attitude of stylised ecstatic dancing.

The historical events of the life of Caitanya are utilised for the expression of ideals and precepts of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. As Dimock has said, "In a sense, what Caitanya was and did is less important than what people thought he was and did..." (1966:32). The idealisation of his life has been accompanied by an attempt to overlay elements of the mythology of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa onto the character and history of Caitanya. The deity worshipped in Navadvip is thus a compound being: he is the historical Caitanya of Navadvip who inspired the Vaiṣṇava revival in Bengal; he is an avatāra of the celestial Kṛṣṇa; he is identical with Kṛṣṇa, and so is the personification of the supreme god-head (the Bhagavat); and he is Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa combined in one incarnation. The contradictions and paradoxes

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[1]These songs were selected for translation by Dimock, along with several others, from the very large collection of Vaiṣṇava lyrics known as the Padakalpataru, compiled by Vaiṣṇava-dāsa about the middle of the 18th century (Dimock 1958:160-161).

inherent in this multivalent conception of Caitanya are all resolved by the assertion that the infinite qualities of the Bhagavat allow for a variety of forms in his līlās, and his infinitude encompasses all contradiction.

The second song and the picture portray Caitanya as he is usually conceived. His physical appearance is further detailed in the Caitanya-caritāmṛta (Chapter III):

> ...our Lord has appeared in yellow complexion as Lord Caitanya
>
> And He has complexion like molten gold, very big body and his voice is like the rumbling of the nimbus.
>
> And He is called a Mahapurusha who measures four cubits in height and in breadth by His own arm.
>
> .
> .
> .
>
> And His arms stretch down to His thighs. And His eyes are blooming like the lotus. And His nose is like the sesamum flower. And His face is like the moon. And He is serene, self-controlled, full of trust in Lord Krishna and devotion to Him. And He is kind to His devotees, gentle and equitable to all beings.
>
> And He wears armlets and bangles of Sandalwood. And He has anointed Himself with sandal-paste. With these beauties He always dances and sings the name of Lord Krishna during Sankirtana.
>
> (Kaviraja 1959:30-31)

Images of Caitanya which are to be found in Navadvip are frequently golden in colour, and two shrines bear the name Soṇār Gaurāṅga (golden Caitanya). The images (vigraha) are always of a human form, sometimes very life-like, but more often stylised to show large eyes and a featureless body. As an avatāra ("the living God" - song 2), he is assigned a human form, and is so represented, but in such a way as to portray his most significant characteristics -- his purity, ecstasy, and devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Imagery of the moon is meant to convey his purity ("that stainless full moon over Nadīyā" - song 3), his poses with arms raised, tears flowing, immersed in song and dance express his ecstasy, and it is understood that the Rādhā-bhāva of the songs is the same as

that acted by Caitanya in his yearning for the love of Kṛṣṇa (song 1).

One very important image of Caitanya in Navadvip -- that of the Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhū Mandira (temple) -- depicts the duality of Caitanya as both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The statue is one which Caitanya himself is supposed to have ordered carved from the wood of the tree under which his mother breast-fed him. The image is a rather typically stylised representation of Caitanya, except for the fact that the image bears a nose-ring (a piece of women's jewellery) in its nose to represent the female aspect of his character. Song 1 illustrates the same duality by having Caitanya look at his reflection in water, and then comment on the two-facedness he sees there.

Vaiṣṇava songs are always intended to augment and intensify the devotion of the listener. Caitanya is depicted in his perfection and ecstasy in the lyrics, and the important emotion which is also portrayed (and meant to be felt by the listener) is supplied by the rhythm and melody of the performance. It is an accepted part of every kīrtana gathering that a few individuals will be swept away in their ecstasy, and will dance or swoon. It is interesting to note that this ecstasy, which seems genuine enough, often conforms to set patterns of behaviour. Participants overcome with emotion, tears streaming down their faces and bodies no longer able to dance, still cry Kṛṣṇa's name on cue, and usually manage to lie in the poses of longing lovers, with heads raised and hands clasped. Dancers adopt poses very characteristic of Kṛṣṇa, as shown in the picture of Caitanya and Nityānanda. The participant is inspired to intense emotion, but this does not lead to abandon. The emotion is directed into patterned action, all intended to emulate Caitanya. The significance and uniqueness of Caitanya lies in the fact that he is inspirational as the perfect devotee (Rādhā) while he is also himself the object of devotion (Kṛṣṇa). He is

therefore both the Bhagavat (Song 3, lines 11 and 15) and the longing devotee (Song 1).

The shrines and temples of Navadvip do not always contain images of Caitanya himself. Also common are dual images of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and sometimes a whole host of the avatāras of Kṛṣṇa and the saintly companions of Caitanya. The pilgrim to Navadvip learns to see Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as the supreme objects of devotion, and Caitanya as their incarnation, and all as different aspects of the single god-head.

Navadvip is believed to be identical with the heavenly Vṛndāvana where Kṛṣṇa eternally sports with the cowgirls, and the līlā of Caitanya is believed to go on constantly in Navadvip. The vitality of the belief in the living presence of Caitanya in Navadvip is illustrated in an event which took place there in January, 1978. A young boy was forcibly taken to hospital despite his objections and resistance. He was badly scratched and bleeding from the nose. It was explained to me that the boy had had a dream that Caitanya would be riding the train from Krishnanagar to Ranaghat (Nadia District) that day. When he awoke, he hurried to the station with his mother, arriving just in time to watch the train pull away. The boy was so distraught at having failed to meet with Caitanya that on his return to Navadvip he repeatedly threw himself to the ground, injuring himself in his grief.

Objects touched by a saintly individual are believed by the Vaiṣṇavas to be inspired with his holiness. This is one reason for the holiness of līlā-bhūmis. The idea of 'divine infection' has also given rise to a cult of relics. At Puri, a small square of cloth is preserved, said to be all that remains of the robe which Caitanya wore in his later years. A copy of the Bhagavad Gītā in which he is supposed to have written a couplet in his own hand is preserved in the temple at Bharatpur, District Murshidabad.

His hair, which was shaved when he took the vows of sannyāsa at Katwa, was buried there and a brick memorial was raised on the spot. An oar used by Caitanya is enshrined in a temple in Ambika-Kalna. And a pair of his sandals (khaḍam), very sacred to the Vaiṣṇavas who are enjoined to take the dust from the feet of the saintly, is preserved at Barangar. The library of the Baranagar Pāṭbārī is like a reliquary, containing all manners of scraps and leavings of revered individuals, as well as small bottles filled with dust and water from many holy places throughout India. In Navadvip, another pair of khaḍam has been covered in silver and is an object of much devotion in the Gaurāṅga Mandira. They are paraded through the streets of the town at certain festivals. A footprint of Caitanya is said to be imprinted in marble at Puri, the stone having been softened like clay by his divine devotional tears.[1] Kennedy (1925:185) mentions a stone slab kept in the temple at Alālnāth in Orissa, which bears a depression said to be the imprint of the body of Caitanya made when he slept there one night.

The kīrtana songs are intended to produce the desired rasa in the devotee, but their meaning also holds out promise of future returns. Those upon whom Caitanya smiles, because of their devotion, receive his love (Song 3: line 14). Caitanya's touch makes one as pure as gold (Song 3: line 1). The devotee hankers after the company of the deity (i.e., to be a Vrajavāsī, Song 4). These features combine to define the goal of the devotee: to bask in the prema (love) of Kṛṣṇa, ever in his company, cleansed of all impurity. This is the salvation of bhakti. Caitanya gives this boon magnanimously to all true-hearted devotees: he "gives, throughout the world, (even to him who does not ask), spontaneously of his wealth of love" (Song 3). That the devotee has taken food from impure men or drunk defiled

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[1]This information was collected from informants in Navadvip and by touring several of the places mentioned. The relics of Caitanya receive mention in Sen (1917:224-27).

water (Song 4) matters less than the strength of his devotion. Ascribed defilements are the strictures of Brāhmaṇism which Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism (in principle at least) supplants with emphasis on personal attitude and practice.[1] The deity yields his love and opens his transcendental heaven to the sincere devotees. In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (10th Skanda, Ad.81) it is written: "I accept what is devoutly offered, whether leaves, flowers, fruit or water, by that man of pure mind who cherishes devotion to me." In the same text (11th Skanda, Ad.25) it says that the heaven of the Bhagavat (i.e., Kṛṣṇa) is beyond the world of guṇas (qualities) and prakṛti (nature). This loka is therefore beyond phenomenal existence and so cannot be attained by means that are part of phenomenal reality, i.e., jñāna (the way of knowledge) and karma (the way of actions and ritual). It is only by bhakti that one gains admission to heaven.

c. The Institutional Structure

The town of Navadvip and the surrounding area included within the nine islands of Śrī Dhāma are all sacred territory. There are, however, institutionalised foci of devotional activities within the sacralised geographical tract. These social bodies, of several kinds, provide objects and locations for the devotion of pilgrims. They are also responsible for the organisation of collective religious activities, for both local residents and pilgrims. The institutional structure of Navadvip is that which gives form and content to the sacredness of the place.

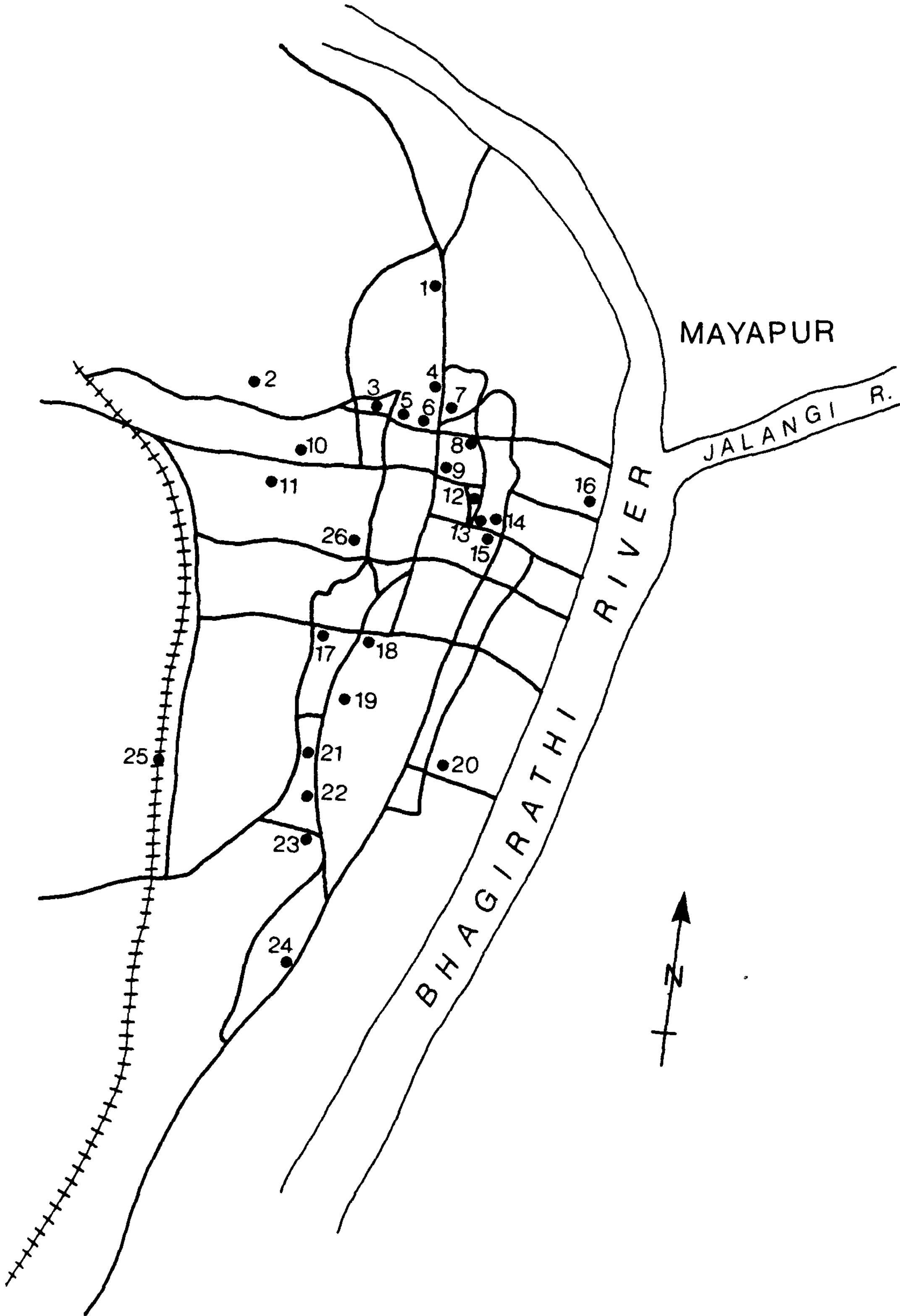
(i) Temples and Shrines

The area of Gaura-maṇḍala has more than one hundred temples and shrines of some significance (see Map 6). Among these, however, only a few are consistently visited by pilgrims, particularly the Dhāmeśvara Śrī Śrī

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[1] The ethics of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism are discussed in De (1961:542-55).

MAP 6 : NAVADVIP



1. Ramakrishna <u>matha</u>
2. Birthplace of Mahāprabhū (Prācīna Mayapur)
3. Agameśvari <u>mandira</u>
4. Jagannātha <u>mandira</u>
5. Gaurāṅga <u>mandira</u>
6. Advaita <u>mandira</u>
7. Nityānanda <u>mandira</u>
8. Govinda Bāṛī
9. Poramā <u>mandira</u>
10. Buḍa Śiva <u>mandira</u>
11. Sanskrit College
12. Malder Śiva <u>mandira</u>
13. Sonār Gaurāṅga
14. Śrīvasa Angana
15. Samāj Bāṛī
16. ferry ghat
17. Baloknātha <u>mandira</u>
18. Dandapani Śiva <u>mandira</u>
19. Alania Śiva <u>mandira</u>
20. Cremation ground
21. Sarasvat Gauḍīya <u>āśrama</u>
22. Mahānirvana <u>matha</u>
23. Devānanda Gauḍīya <u>matha</u>
24. Manipuri <u>mandira</u>
25. Railway Station
26. Bhāratsevāśrama

Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhū Mandira, the Navadvip Samāj Bāṛī and the Śrī Śrī Govinda Mandira.

The Dhāmeśvara Śrī Śrī Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhū[1] Mandira (usually called simply Gaurāṅga Mandira, i.e., temple to Gaurāṅga) contains a wooden image of Caitanya supposedly carved on his own instructions. He is said to have ordered this done so that after his departure to Puri, his wife and mother would not have been left totally without his presence: they were to worship this wooden image and a pair of his khaḍam instead of serving him in person. The temple is located in an old part of Navadvip called Mahāprabhū-pāṛa (i.e., the neighbourhood of Caitanya), on a street which is lined with the houses of the Goswamy priests and their personal shrines.

The Gaurāṅga Mandira is jointly owned by a collectivity called the Viṣṇupriyā Samiti, to which all the practising priests among the Navadvip Goswamys belong. Gosvāmin is translated literally as 'cow-master' but figuratively as "one who has conquered his senses" (Majumdar 1969:233n.) and has come to designate "a bonafide teacher of religion possessing spiritual authority" (Tirtha 1947:102), but the name (conventionally rendered in English as Goswamy or Gosain) is also used as a family name by the descendants of those who were close associates of Caitanya. The Goswamys of Navadvip are descended from the family of Caitanya's wife Viṣṇupriyā (hence the name of their assembly). Her brother Jādhava Miśra had one son, Mādhava Miśra, who in turn was father to Ṣaṣṭi-dāsa Goswamy, the first servant (sevāit) of the temple and the head of the Navadvip Goswamy lineage. With the division of responsibility for the work of the temple between Ṣaṣṭi-dāsa's two sons, the two currently existing sub-lineages of Goswamys were formed.[2]

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[1]Mahāprabhū = great master.

[2]The descendants of Nityānanda, through his son Virabhadra, have established three lines of Goswamys in Bengal: at Kardah, 24 Parganas District,

The history of the Gaurāṅga Mandira has been shaped by relations between the Vaiṣṇavas of Navadvip and the non-Vaiṣṇava community in the town (spear-headed by the Śāktas, whose blood-letting practices and worship of the goddess were diametrically opposed to Vaiṣṇava beliefs). In the early days following the death of Caitanya, the Vaiṣṇavas of Navadvip were not strong or well-organised. Opposition to them from the non-Vaiṣṇava communities had also been revived by contemporaries of Caitanya, particularly the Tantric Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīsa, author of the Tantra-sara,[1] and Raghunandana.[2] As Vaiṣṇavism grew in Navadvip, the Śāktas felt the threat to their position and sought the permission of the ruling Rāja of Kṛṣṇanagar (still the district headquarters of Nadia) to burn the wooden image of Caitanya. Their contention was that it was improper for Hindus to worship a man as a deity (for they did not accept the divinity of Caitanya). The Rāja agreed. The Vaiṣṇavas quickly hid their revered image in an underground vault concealed beneath a Kālī temple, and there, according to the Goswamys, they preserved it and worshipped it in secrecy.

This situation persisted until about 250 years ago when the Mahārāja of the state of Manipur paid a visit to Navadip. The inhabitants of that

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Goishpara in Malda and Lata in Burdwan. The former are the most respected of the Bengali Goswamys, while the latter are ascendant among the followers of Caitanya in Vṛndāvana. The lineal descendants (or descendants of disciples) of the following men are Goswamys located at the places named in parentheses after the founder's name: Advaita (Santipur), Vaṁsī-vādana Chaṭṭopādhyāya (Bāghnāpāra), Gadādhara (Vikrampur, Dacca District, Bangladesh), Narahari Sarkar (Śrīkhaṇḍa), Narotama (Kheturi) and Śrīnivāsa (Chakuṇḍi). The Bāghnāpāra Goswamys are said by Kennedy (1925:152) to be Vaidya by caste, while all the others are Brāhmaṇ.

[1]Tantrasaraḥ by Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīsa Bhaṭṭācārya has been published in Sanskrit by the Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Benares, 1938.

[2]cf. De (1961:27-28).

far eastern state of India are mainly Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, having been converted by the disciples of Narottama-Ṭhākur in the 18th century.[1] When the Mahārāja saw the oppressed condition of the Navadvip Vaiṣṇavas, he approached the Rāja of Kṛṣṇanagar and had the threat against the Vaiṣṇavas lifted. He then endowed the temple with sufficient funds to erect a building to house the image of Caitanya. Additionally, he procured land in Navadvip where he had raised another major temple, now known as the Anu Mahāprabhū or Manipuri temple.[2] The activities of this Mahārāja (Bhāgya-caraṇa Singh) of Manipur are still recognised in Navadvip: Manipuris are responsible for painting the wooden image of Caitanya of the Gaurāṅga Mandira every several years.[3]

The temple building built by Bhāgya-caraṇa Singh (with the help of the Mahārāja of Viṣṇupur) is not the present structure. The new building was constructed about 1900 following the raising of a public subscription of Rs.80,000. At the same time, the division of responsibilities for work in the temple was codified and recorded. It is worth looking into this division in some depth as the system of dividing the service and income of the Gaurāṅga Mandira in Navadvip is typical of that to be found in many Bengali temples.

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[1] cf. N. Tombi Singh, Manipur: A Study, M/s Raj Stores, Imphal, 1972, p.33, and N. Tombi Singh, Manipur and the Mainstream, N.K. Singh, Imphal, 1975.

[2] The Manipuri temple also has a wooden image of Caitanya installed. The daughter of Bhāgya-caraṇa Singh is supposed to have had a dream in which Caitanya told her that an image of himself was to be found in a certain tree. The next day she went out and found the tree, stripped off the bark, and found a perfectly carved image of Caitanya beneath. She arranged for its installation in the Navadvip temple. This is another example of tree-imagery applied to Caitanya. It is also interesting to note that the statue of the Virgin Mary which is now the object of an important pilgrimage in Mexico as Our Lady of Ocotlan was also found fully-carved in the trunk of a tree (Turner and Turner 1978:59).

[3] Following the death of Mahārāja Bhāgya-caraṇa Singh, some of his ashes were taken to Navadvip "to join the sacred soil of the birthplace of Lord Caitanya" (Singh, op. cit., 1975:40).

At the time of the completion of the Gaurāṅga Mandira, all the Goswamy families took houses in Mahāprabhū-paṛa near the temple. Presently there are 131 adult male Goswamy shareholders in the temple. They all trace their genealogy back to the sons of Ṣaṣṭī-dāsa Goswamy (by both direct descent and affinity), and each current shareholder holds a portion of the original two shares. The two brothers -- Rāmadeva and Mahādeva -- did not divide the temple work and income evenly, however. The elder took 10/16 of the total, leaving 6/16 for his younger brother.[1] Because both brothers would be in birth or death pollution at the same times, and so be unable to approach the temple then, the Brāhmaṇ husband of Rāmadeva's daughter was given fifteen days out of Rāmadeva's share. In return, this Brāhmaṇ would perform the temple sevā when the Goswamys were disallowed from doing so. His descendants continue to hold shares in the temple.

The right to perform pūjā descends patrilineally as a rule, but there is no firm regulation. Brothers' sons and daughters' husbands are also not excluded from inheritance. Sons may opt for temple work or pursue other careers and many have chosen the latter course (for example, the principal of the Navadvip College is a Navadvip Goswamy).

Several days during the year are kept apart from those inherited by the sevāits of the temple. These days are reserved to generate income which is used to meet the expenses of maintaining the temple, paying taxes and financing utsavas (celebrations). Ten days of the Ratha-yātrā festival, two days of the Rāsa-yātrā, four days of the Dola-yātrā and eight days of Varuṇi are reserved. Any of the Goswamys may bid for the right to lease

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[1] Previous to the decimalisation of the rupee, there were 16 annas to one rupee. It was common to consider 16 fractions of any item being divided, and so the sevā and income of the temple were divided by 16ths, with ten annas for Ramadeva and six annas for Mahādeva. The division was more complicated than this, changing monthly, but was intended to produce a ten and six parts division over the year. The intricate details, which exasperated both me and the Goswamys explaining them to me, need not be sorted out here.

the temple services for one or more of these days, in return for an advance payment. The presiding priest whose bid is successful performs the pūjās, and keeps for himself any amount of income collected in the temple on his day(s), except for offerings from pilgrims of metallic items, clothes, utensils and other non-monetary items, all of which go to the temple committee (the executive of the Viṣṇupriyā Samiti). Any donations above Rs.16 are divided, with the first sixteen rupees going to the leaseholder and the balance to the temple.

On the other days of the year, the Goswamys have traditional inherited rights to do the pūjā. The division from the single first sevāit to the present 131 has required a very accurate division of time. Each day is divided into thirty-two units (called dunda). Whichever of the Goswamys holds rights to the instant following the crossing of the eighth dunda performs the Nitya pūjā ārati (8 A.M.); the priest holding rights to the period after the twelfth dunda does the bhoga (1 P.M.); the one responsible after the twenty-eighth dunda does the evening (sandhyā) ārati (after sunset); and the Goswamy on duty after the thirty-second dunda has responsibility for both the night (śyāmā) pūjā (9 P.M.) and the morning (mangala) ārati (5 A.M.). These are the five pūjās performed daily in the Gaurāṅga Mandira.

Although responsibility for the daily pūjās is allocated according to the division of the daily sevā in the temple, the actual times of the pūjās do not necessarily fall within the portion of the day allotted to the Goswamy who must perform the worship. The repeated division of the time periods in the temple has made holdings small, and so a priest's temple duties may not come during the period of his right to perform pūjā for pilgrims.

The deity of the Gaurāṅga Mandira receives the attentions appropriate to the living man he was. He is awakened by songs at daybreak, has recited to him scriptures such as the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Caitanya-caritāmṛta and

Bhagavad Gītā during the Mangala ārati, is garlanded, dressed and offered fine food of specific sorts during the day, followed by a rest (when the inner temple closes), then a bath and fresh decorations and an evening filled with the reading of scriptures, kīrtana, worship and, finally, songs to aid his repose.

The text which is acknowledged as authoritative in matters of worship in the Gaurāṅga Mandira is the Haribhaktivilāsa, a standard Gauḍīya work. This book gives directions for the worship of Kṛṣṇa, but never of Caitanya himself. More recent handbooks have been written for the worship of Caitanya. These draw upon the Haribhaktivilāsa, but justify the inclusion of Caitanya as an object of pūjā by identifying him with Kṛṣṇa. The basic pūjā of the Gaurāṅga Mandira is the śoṛasopācara, the offering in sixteen parts. The liturgy of all the pūjās is in Sanskrit, while the lyrics of the twice daily saṅkīrtana are in Bengali.

All of the expenses of the pūjās are met by the Goswamy on duty at that time[1] and all the income -- deriving from an admission fee (bhet) of 33 paisa, donations, the costs of making offerings, or taking a share of the prasāda of the bhoga, etc. -- go to the adhikāri (right-holder) of that time.

The only people allowed to offer pūjā in the Gaurāṅga Mandira are the 131 Goswamys. They perform all the work during their allotted times and serve all the pilgrims who stop at the temple to offer formal worship. It follows, then, that there are no jajmān-type relationships developed between priests and pilgrims. Only the Goswamy on duty is allowed to serve the pilgrim and so the pilgrim accepts whichever Goswamy is present when

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[1]The bhoga is generally prepared by the women of the family of the duty-holder. A professional cook is available when these women cannot perform this task.

he wishes to offer his devotion.

It can be noted here that the functions of the Goswamys as religious specialists extend beyond their temple duties (which could hardly support all their families at an average of fewer than three days' share per year). The Goswamys of Navadvip are also professional mantra-givers. It is their right to initiate devotees into the use of the sacred syllables which are recited in personal devotional practice. This activity gives rise to abiding ties between those who are initiated by the Goswamys (the siṣyas, or disciples) and their initiators (gurus). The Goswamys do develop a group of clients, but not from their temple-priest role. A larger part of a Goswamy's income will come from fees for initiations and gifts (dakṣiṇā) given to him as guru (as enjoined upon devotees as a method of vaidhī-bhakti) than from temple service. Disciples are supposed to give annual gifts, as well as gifts at the occasion of life-cycle events which take place within the families of both the disciples and their guru. There are no fixed amounts for these gifts, which vary according to the disciple's means from Rs.2 upwards. Risley (1892:344) notes that at that time a Goswamy received a fee of 20 annas (Rs.1.25) per initiation.

The Goswamys initiate disciples as a matter of ascribed inherited right. They are thus generally dīkṣā (initiating) gurus, but not śikṣā (teaching) gurus. The latter title goes to accomplished renunciates, who may be, but need not be, Goswamys. Few Goswamys give up the householder (gṛhi or gṛihastha) life for one of renunciation. The disciples of a Goswamy are not inherited by his son, although the children of the disciples of his father automatically become the younger Goswamy's disciples.

The social standing of the Goswamys is certainly high within the Vaiṣṇava community. This respect in turn contributes to a relatively high

status in the wider Hindu society, as does the fact that most are Brāhmaṇs. The Goswamys' social position is affected somewhat adversely by the fact that as gurus to Vaiṣṇavas, they have contact with people of the lower castes, whom the Vaiṣṇavas admit to their fold. Some Goswamys, particularly those of Santipur (descendants of Advaita), do not accept lower caste disciples, and claim in consequence a higher status among the Goswamys.

There are several important annual celebrations held in the Gaurāṅga Mandira. Most of these are also celebrated in other temples and shrines of Navadvip, so it will eliminate duplication to discuss the sacred calendars of all the temples together.

The man who arranged for the collection of funds for the construction of the most recent Gaurāṇga Mandira -- Bhuvaneśvara Sādhu Ṭhākur -- was the inspiration behind the construction of the second of the three most popular Vaiṣṇava temples in Navadvip, known as the Govinda[1] Bāṛī. This shrine was completed in 1926 and, although recent, is a large and impressive building, located on the Gantala Road. The main vigraha (images) of the sanctum are of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa seated on a silver throne.

The Govinda Bāṛī is typical of a large number of Navadvip shrines in that it was built by the disciples of an ascetic in his memory. The concentration of ascetic Vaiṣṇavas (tyāgis) in the places of pilgrimage is one of the principal reasons for visiting sacred places, and the more renowned among these men and women are honoured with quite extensive construction in their names. Since ascetics give initiation, and one is to be devoted to the guru, these donations and endowments are seen as guru-sevā (work for the preceptor) in accordance with Vaiṣṇava behavioural prescriptions. Two large shrines in honour of tyāgis (one of whom was still alive) were under con-

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[1]A name of Kṛṣṇa.

struction in Navadvip during my stay there.

Once established, the shrines in the name of the guru function as temples to the installed deities, drawing inspiration from the life of the preceptor. At the Govinda Bāṛī, pictures of Bhuvaneśvara Sādhu Ṭhākur and his disciples are prominently displayed, and tales of his miraculous acts frequently told by the present generation of spiritual descendants of the founder. He is said to have sent a telegram to the Rāja of Monghyr (Bihar), advising him that his son would be cured of his illness if he recited the names of Kṛṣṇa for 7 days. The boy was cured on the receipt of the telegram. He is also said to have cured a leper with the sacred name. The power and renown of the resident or former ascetics of a shrine encourage contemporary devotees in their practices, and also increase the attractiveness of the shrine to pilgrims.

The daily schedule of worship in the Govinda Bāṛī consists of the same five pūjās encountered at the Gaurāṅga Mandira, only here offered to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. The work of the pūjā is directed by one man, the chief disciple of the previous sevāit, assisted by other disciples. The chief sevāit is also responsible for the management of all the shrine affairs, planning, financing, operation, etc. In this work he is assisted by a committee of nine local Vaiṣṇava men. The chief sevāit has never been a Goswamy. Unlike many of the temples in Navadvip, there is no admission charge to the Govinda Bāṛī. And also unlike most of the temples, non-Vaiṣṇavas are not permitted to enter the large hall before the image which is the scene of the pilgrims' devotional activities. This ruling seems to run counter to the ecumenical ethic of Caitanya himself, but is fully in keeping with the rigid sectarian attitudes of the incumbent sevāit.

The third of the major temples in Navadvip is the Śrī Śrī Rādhāramaṇa Bag Samāj Mandira, commonly called the Samāj ('society') Bāṛī ('house').

This institution is an active centre for Vaiṣṇava practices within Navadvip and Bengal and beyond. While its impressive shrine and its frequent kīrtana activities attract pilgrims, these features of the Samāj Bāṛī are only one part of the organisation's functions. Founded in 1905, its trustees now have under their control temples in Vṛndāvana, Benares, Calcutta (Baranagar), Chandrakor (Midnapore District) and Murshidabad. The board consists of five male tyāgis, two in Navadvip, and one each in Calcutta, Murshidabad and Puri.

In our personal discussions, the director of the Navadvip Samāj Bāṛī defined the goals of its operation as (1) ṭhākur-sevā (service to the deity), (2) Vaiṣṇava-sevā (service to the Vaiṣṇava community), and (3) nāma-sevā (spreading the name, i.e. encouraging people to undertake devotional practices involving the names of Kṛṣṇa). The temple is located in a large, walled compound in the centre of Navadvip and is often thronged with pilgrims. There are daily pūjās in the temple to the images of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and to Barha Bābāji, the tyāgi whose disciples founded the Samāj Bāṛī. The centre in Navadvip operates a charitable dispensary, provides open space where pilgrims can sleep for the night and sponsors regular kīrtana singing, especially at the time of the annual celebration of the birth of the founder of the Samāj Bāṛī, held during nine days in Phālguna month.

The cult-propagating activities of the Samāj Bāṛī mostly concern the initiation of devotees. The giving of dīkṣā by a learned or saintly Vaiṣṇava is an important step on the devotional path because the guru is the guide who will take the devotee from stage to stage in his progress towards perfected devotion. The subject of initiations and mantras (sacred texts or incantations) is complicated.[1] Suffice to note that the tyāgis of the Samāj Bāṛī perform the work of dīkṣā-gurus (to both householders

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[1] Cf. De (1961:366) and Majumdar (1969:329-31).

and tyāgi disciples). We shall see later that seeking initiation or offering service to the guru is one of the motives for pilgrimage to Navadvip. By receiving initiation in a sacred place and serving one's guru there, the devotee performs several of the important devotional activities of vaidhī-bhakti: guru-sevā (a very highly valued form of devotion), pada-sevā (visiting the tīrthas), arcanā (recitation of mantras), as well as incidental performances such as kīrtana, vandana (prostration to the deity) and śravaṇa (listening to accounts, texts or praises of Kṛṣṇa). The Samāj Bāṛī thus performs two types of services: it encourages the performance of many kinds of devotional activities; and it serves those who will perform them, both pilgrim and resident tyāgi. The Samāj Bāṛī's role in providing food, shelter and a structure of care for renunciates is an important service to those who serve the community as its preceptors.

The remaining shrines and temples of Navadvip fall into two categories: the Śiva-Śākta temples and the lesser Vaiṣṇava sacred places.

The strength of the Śākta community in Navadvip was never completely dissipated by the ascendancy of the Vaiṣṇavas. The number, size and activity of their temples bears witness to this.

The principal non-Vaiṣṇava temple in Navadvip is that of Poramā,[1] located in the very central square of the town. The central sanctum of the temple is a small, dark, womb-like crevice reaching into the heart of a giant banyan tree. Within the small space is a ghaṭa (pitcher) said to have been installed by a Tantric sannyāsi named Bṛhdratha. He entrusted the worship to a man whose grandson, Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma, figured in the

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[1]The name Poramā is usually said to derive from the Bengali paduader-mā (mother of those who read), since she is considered to be especially kind to students and seekers after knowledge. This trait results in an association of Poramā with Sarasvatī, the orthodox Hindu goddess of knowledge. It is also said that the tree once caught fire (poḍa - to burn) and the name refers to this incident. There seems to be a strong local folk element to the cult of this goddess.

life of Caitanya (Majumdar 1969:194-201; De 1961:86). The temple of Poramā is therefore dated to around 1400 A.D.

The shrine to the goddess is a small, roofed room built under the limbs of the tree. The sides are open, although grilled. A priest squats by the mouth of the dark opening, and pilgrims approach him to perform the worship. The right to perform pūjā is in the hands of one family of Brāhmaṇs descended from Sārvabhauma. The pilgrim's offering is almost invariably a string of flowers which the offerer hangs upon the branches of the tree above the sanctum. This act is accompanied by a few rapid words and movements by the priest.

The māhātmya (glory) of Poramā derives from the age of the temple, its central location in Navadvip, the commanding impressiveness of the tree under which it stands, and the reputation of the goddess as a granter of wishes and desires. The Vaiṣṇavas of Navadvip have found a place for Poramā in their conceptions of the holy dhāma of Kṛṣṇa by equating this goddess with Kātyāyanī, resident goddess of Vṛndāvana. Furthermore, according to E. O. James,[1] the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas maintain that Sarasvatī, with whom Poramā is frequently identified, was once the wife of Viṣṇu.

The temple of Poramā is flanked on either side by temples to the goddess Bhavatāriṇi and to Bhavatāraṇa (Śiva). There is another famous Śiva temple in Navadvip named Buḍa-Śiva (Old Śiva), which local informants claim pre-dates Caitanya. This temple is also identified with one in Vṛndāvana. As Gopesvara Mahādeva is the kṣetra-pāla (lord of the place) of Vṛndāvana, so is Buḍa-Śiva the fatherly king of Navadvip. There are another five temples to Śiva in Navadvip, but these are much less frequently visited by pilgrims.

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[1] Cult of the Mother Goddess, Thames and Hudson, London 1959, p.110.

Two goddess temples which are also of interest to pilgrims are those of Āgameśvari (founded by Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīsa) and Abhayamā. The Goswamys claim that the latter temple was founded in honour of the female aspect of Caitanya. It is because of its association with Caitanya that this temple is visited by Vaiṣṇava pilgrims. Caitanya participated in a theatrical performance in which he took the part of a woman. Milk miraculously poured from his breasts, and all the Vaiṣṇavas present drank a portion. Caitanya went into a trance and announced that all those who had witnessed the miracle no longer would suffer from fear (hence abhaya-mā, mother without fear). The house where this event took place remained unaccountably lit up for seven days, and later a shrine was raised on the site.

The lesser Vaiṣṇava shrines are clustered into two main concentrations, with many others dotted here and there throughout the nine islands. The most important cluster, surrounding the Gaurāṅga Mandira in Mahāprabhū-paṛa, is heavily visited by pilgrims en route to and from the main temple. The large houses on either side of the street are the residences of the Goswamy families, eleven of whom have created shrines within their private dwellings. These shrines are open to pilgrims for a fee of 25 to 33 paisa. Using life-sized images, each of these shrines portrays some event of significance to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. A list of their themes will demonstrate how a visit to this street alone quite thoroughly educates a pilgrim into the history of the līlās of Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya:

1. Gupta Vṛndāvana - Navadvip is known as Gupta (hidden) Vṛndāvana. Spread throughout the courtyard of this house are large-scale models of the important features of Vṛndāvana, including the Śyāmā Kuṇḍa, Rādhā Kuṇḍa, the Govardhana hill and the seven holy rivers.[1]

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[1] See Chapter II for a list of these rivers.

2. Nityānanda Milana - where Nityānanda and Caitanya are supposed to have met for the first time (milana = meeting place).

3. Upanayana Līlā - commemorating the sacred thread ceremony (upanayana) of Caitanya.

4. Śara-bhuja - the three incarnations of Kṛṣṇa seen by Nityānanda and Gadādhara (i.e., Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya; the image is six-armed (śara = six, bhuja = arm) to represent the three individuals in one body.

5. Advaita Mahāprabhū Mandira - commemorating the meeting of Advaita and Caitanya.

6. Jaggai-Madhai - commemorating the redemption of two sinful brothers by Caitanya.

7. Śacī-mātā Angana - in memory of Caitanya's mother.

8. Gaurā-Govinda Līlā - when Caitanya appeared as Govinda (Kṛṣṇa) to his wife Viṣṇupriyā.

9. Soṇār Neva Gaurāṅga - a new gold-coloured image of Caitanya.

10. Caitanya's Marriage Līlā - in honour of his marriage to Viṣṇupriyā.

11. Caitanya's liberation.

Located nearby are the schoolhouse where Caitanya is supposed to have taught, a temple to Nityānanda alone, and houses of various saintly individuals containing shrines to Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. All of these are open to pilgrims.

The second concentration of small shrines is located near the Samāj Bāṛī, on Śrīvāsa Angana Road. Here are found the oldest golden-metallic image of Caitanya (Soṇār Gaurāṅga), Jaggai-Madhai Udhara Mandira (commemorating the redemption of the same two brothers), Śrīvāsa Angana (the supposed location of the frenzied meetings after Caitanya's return from Gayā) and Śara-bhuja Mahāprabhū (again the three avatāras of Kṛṣṇa).

Other shrines outside these two areas are those at the birthplace of Viṣṇupriyā (in Malañca-paṛa), Gadādhara Angana and various minor shrines. All contain sanctums with life-like or stylised images of Caitanya, his associates, or Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, portraying the theme of the shrine. Pilgrims generally prostrate towards the image, circumambulate, perhaps give a few coins in offering and then leave. Visits are usually short as there are so many places to see. The streets around the shrines, especially near the two clusters, are a tangle of wandering pilgrims, shouting hawkers and impatient rickshaw-pullers, hurrying along their pilgrim-clients.

Within the sacred sphere of Navadvip (the Gaura-maṇḍala), the village of Mayapur is the most frequently visited by pilgrims. There one finds several maṭhas, most remarkably the huge ISKCON complex and the Gauḍīya Maṭha.[1] The dargāh of Cānda Kāzī (or Qāzi), a former Muslim governor of Navadvip who was converted to a Kṛṣṇa bhakta by Caitanya, and the supposed birthplace of Caitanya, are also attractions to pilgrims.

Another feature of Navadvip which draws pilgrims is the location of the town on the sacred Ganges River, which the Gaura-maṇḍala straddles. A segment of pilgrims visit Navadvip specifically to perform rites at this holiest of Indian rivers.

The objects of a pilgrim's attention in Navadvip are many and varied. It would not be uncommon for a Vaiṣṇava pilgrim to Navadvip to have a darśana (sighting) of Caitanya and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's vigrahas, to give obeisance at one or more shrines of the goddess and to Śiva, to visit and bathe in the Ganges, to encounter and perhaps talk with a Vaiṣṇava holy man, to

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[1] One cannot but be surprised at what one sees in the ISKCON centre, where the poor, often rural peasants of Bengal tread softly as they tour the modern facilities of the maṭha, and are approached by foreigners, often much taller than themselves, with shaven heads, sāṛīs and occasionally a sacred thread, to purchase a book or make an offering.

visit the tomb of a revered Muslim (Cānda Kāzī) and to participate in various sorts of devotional performances. Navadvip is not a strictly sectarian enclave. We have seen instances in which myths and assertions are advanced by the Vaiṣṇavas to establish putative links to other religious groups in the town which they could neither ignore nor absorb, such as the claims that Poramā and Buḍa-Śiva are identical with deities in Vṛndāvana, when in fact there are indigenous historical reasons for the existence of prominent shrines to Śiva and Śakti in Navadvip.[1] Caitanya himself had a Muslim disciple, as did Barha Bābāji of the Samāj Bāṛī, while Cānda Kāzī is still acknowledged as an earnest devotee of Kṛṣṇa. These examples are indicative of the complex religious life of this Vaiṣṇava centre through its history, and the strains of religion running counter to Vaiṣṇavism which this community has had to accommodate.[2] Navadvip is predominantly Vaiṣṇava in character, but the conflicts and interactions of the different groups within the wider Bengali religious environment have left their mark on the town as well.

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[1]The Goswamys profess a reconciliatory attitude to the Śāktas saying that Rādhā herself is Śakti. One told a story about Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavagisa, the Tantric, and his brother Mādhavacandra, who was a Vaiṣṇava. Both brothers had mentally offered a bunch of bananas growing in their house to their respective deities. It happened that on the day that both brothers had decided to pick the ripened fruit, Mādhavacandra got there first and so offered the fruit to Kṛṣṇa. When Kṛṣṇānanda found this out, he became enraged. He snatched the scimitar of Kālī, to whom he had promised the fruit, and went in search of his brother. He came to the door of his brother's Kṛṣṇa temple and, finding the door closed, he brandished the sword high and crashed through the door. Inside he found Kālī with Kṛṣṇa seated on her knee, feeding him bananas. The moral was drawn that if offerings are made with devotion, it does not matter to which deity.

[2]Cf. O'Connell (1975).

(ii) Ākhāḍās, Ṭols, Maṭhas and Āśramas

Navadvip has been a centre of learning and cult activities for more than 500 years. This historical importance of the town has given rise to many religious institutions of several kinds, both Vaiṣṇava and other.

Ākhāḍā is sometimes translated as 'monastery,' but Ghurye (1964:177) distinguishes ākhāḍās from maṭhas (also monasteries) on the basis of the types of ascetics to be found in each. Any renunciate may belong to a maṭha, but only the militant sections of the Bairāgis (vairāgis, i.e., Vaiṣṇava ascetics) are organised into ākhāḍās.[1] The origin of ākhāḍās is traced by Ghurye to defence by the Vaiṣṇavas of their places of pilgrimage from the onslaughts of Śaiva sannyāsis. This origin may apply to the Navadvip ākhāḍās as well, as the Vaiṣṇavas of the town were certainly under threat from the Śāktas and Muslims in the early years of the establishment of their centre in Navadvip. But at present, ākhāḍās serve more as gathering places for the singing of kīrtana than as institutes for training in martial arts, and even in this reduced role they are in decline. There are two main ākhāḍās in Navadvip, distinguished from one another as the large (bara) and small (chhoṭa) ākhāḍās. The former actually is named Śrī Rādhā Śyāmā Sundara Ākhāḍā and the latter is the Śrī Gaurā Visvarūpa Ākhāḍā. An image of Kṛṣṇa is found in the former and of Caitanya in the latter. In total, there are about 8 ākhāḍās in Navadvip, each capable of housing 20 or 30 vairāgis. Few are full, however. The larger ākhāḍās have stone courtyards attached for kīrtanas. An occasional pilgrim visits the ākhāḍās as a tourist, or to join in a kīrtana, but the ākhāḍās have no direct role in pilgrimage practices in Navadvip.

The ṭols of Navadvip have changed little from the time when they were

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[1] Śaiva ascetics also have ākhāḍās; cf. Ghurye (1964:101ff.).

[2] Excerpted in Hunter (1973:107-11).

surveyed by Professor E. B. Cowell in 1864 (Garett 1910:181-83).[1] They are still primitive of comforts and small in size, existing only because of one teacher's desire to teach students. The ṭol is really no more than the place of his tutoring, and the institution dissolves when the tutor ceases teaching. These establishments of learning no longer bear the reputation for excellence which they once carried, having been superseded in their functions by the government-funded centres such as the Navadvip Sanskrit College and the University of Calcutta Sanskrit College. Ṭols also figure little in present-day pilgrim behaviour, although the former glory of Navadvip as a centre of learning has a residual effect in enhancing the reputation of the town to pilgrims.

There are several maṭhas in Navadvip. The maṭha of Bansi-dāsa Bābāji, the Devānanda Gauḍīya Maṭha and the Mahānirvāna Maṭha are all to be found in Navadvip, while the Gauḍīya Sarasvat Maṭha and ISKCON are located in Mayapur. These maṭhas have a less monolithic significance in Navadvip than the Tarakeswar maṭha has in its place, but still perform important functions in the sacred centre. Like the Samāj Bāṛī, the maṭhas are active in giving support to Vaiṣṇava renunciates who, in the case of the maṭhas, generally belong to the order of vairāgis of the particular maṭha that aids them. Maṭhas also organise group activities such as kīrtana and parikramā (circumambulation of the town or Gaura-maṇḍala) on festival days. The Gauḍīya Maṭha especially is active in providing accommodation and assistance to pilgrims to Navadvip.

The Gauḍīya Maṭha is the largest and most important of these organisations in Navadvip. According to the present director of the maṭha, Swami Bhaktivedanta Parjyataka Mahārāja, it was founded by Śrīmat Bhaktisiddhanta

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[1]Excerpted in Hunter (1973:107-11).

Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in Mayapur in 1915, and then established in Navadvip in 1940 by Srīmat Bhakti Pragyan Keśava Gosvāmin Mahārāja. The maṭha has been very active in the progagation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Subisidiary centres are now located in Puri, Mathurā, Madras, Assam and Gayā (Vidyarthi 1961:69), as well as Chinsura, Hooghly District and Jhargram, Midnapore, in West Bengal. In 1978 there were about 50 vairāgis of the maṭha resident in Navadvip. This maṭha is typical in performing two functions with respect to pilgrimage: by spreading the teachings of Caitanya outside of Navadvip, it encourages pilgrimage to Caitanya's birthplace; and within the town, it provides guidance, assistance and housing to pilgrims and visiting sannyāsis. The Gauḍīya Maṭha also produces a wide range of publications on religious matters, including a monthly magazine.

An āśrama is generally taken to be the abode or residence of a Hindu saint, sādhu or ascetic. It concerns itself with the spread of proper religious behaviour among the people, and has a membership of both householders and ascetics. In some cases the traditional role of the āśrama has been altered in the last century so that modern functions in the community - youth organisations, social service work, health services, libraries, cultural events, etc. - have come to be included. In Navadvip one finds both traditional āśramas which centre on the instruction and initiation provided by one revered teacher (guru), and modern institutions, with large buildings and a variety of facilities. The former are represented in Navadvip by the small establishments of Śrī Aparūpa Gaurā-hari Āmṛta Āśrama, Śrī Giridhari Āśrama, Śyāmābai Āśrama, Śrī Rāmacandra and Bhajana Āśrama, Saradeśvari Āśrama and Patal Sādhu Āśrama. Each of these is a small institution in which several members lead frugal lives, where members from outside Navadvip stay in monastic style during visits to the town, and where a limited amount

of religious activity goes on. These āśramas are of importance only to those pilgrims who are members of them, and are a common feature of many places of pilgrimage (cf. Bhardwaj 1973:211-12).

The modernised āśramas are larger and more visible institutions in Navadvip. The Ramakrishna Mission, a large and wealthy organisation in Bengal dedicated to the spread of Hindu ideals and the performance of social service work, has an āśrama in Navadvip. It is overshadowed in importance, however, by the Bharatsevāśrama. This organisation, which has modelled itself on the Ramakrishna Mission, maintains a multi-storeyed guest house and pilgrims' assistance service in Navadvip. Staffed by several initiates of the organisation who have renounced the householder's life for service to the poor, and also by volunteers from the householder membership, for whom work for the Bharatsevāśrama is charitable service to the community, the āśrama houses several thousand pilgrims during each of the major festivals of Navadvip. Its rooms are better equipped than those of the maṭhas and lodging houses in the town, and so tend to be preferred by wealthier and more distinguished pilgrims to Navadvip, and by at least one anthropologist.

The Rādhāramaṇa Sevāśrama, which is an arm of the Samāj Bāṛī, has been mentioned earlier. Its principal work at present is the operation of a charitable dispensary for the assistance of poor pilgrims who fall ill while on pilgrimage.

Lodging houses are very little utilised by pilgrims to Navadvip. There are only 4 or 5 of these commercial establishments, and they cater more to business and professional tours than pilgrimages. Pilgrims generally seek out accommodation at the maṭhas and āśramas of the town. At festival times any covered porch or balcony is taken over by pilgrims who stretch out there for the night.

d. The Festival Calendar

There is a saying in Bengal: "Twelve months and thirteen festivals." Navadvip exceeds the standard. There are many festivals and celebrations observed in the numerous shrines, temples and other religious institutions of the town. The most important festivals are the Rasa-yātrā and Dola-yātrā commemorating incidents from the lives of Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya. These celebrations attract the largest annual attendance of pilgrims to Navadvip. The remaining festivals attract considerably less interest from outside the town. The most concise manner of presenting the annual sacred calendar of Navadvip is a month-wise list, as follows:

Vaiśākha: (1) Candana-yātrā Utsava: running twelve days from the date of akṣaya tṛtīya (the 'undiminished' or 'inexhaustible' third day of the month), the festival is also known as Phula-dola. Accompanied by kīrtana, the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa image of the Samāj Bāṛī is daily decorated with flowers for each of the twelve days. This festival is observed with less pomp in the Gaurāṅga Mandira and Madana-gopāla Mandira.

(2) Naukā Vilasa: on the day of the full moon (pūrṇīmā) of Vaiśākha month, the image from the Samāj Bāṛī is fully decorated with flowers and taken on a boat (naukā) on the Ganges. The image is then taken for a darśana of Poramā, and then returned to the Samāj Bāṛī.

Jyaiṣṭha: (1) Daśaharā Gaṅgā-pūjā: on the tenth of the month, before the full moon, devotees come by boat from Krishnagar carrying an image of Mā Gaṅgā. They bring their own priests and perform the pūjā on the banks of the river. The image is then immersed. Recently merchants of the Navadvip bazar have begun to hold their own Gaṅgā-pūjā.

(2) Jagannātha Snāna-yātrā: on the day of the pūrṇīmā people bear Ganges water to the Jagannātha temple in Nityānanda-paṛa and Poraghat,

and pour it on the deity (hence snāna = bath).

Āṣāḍha: (1) The Ratha-yātrā begins on the second day of the month and runs to the tenth when the car (ratha) used in the processions is returned to its place of storage.

Śrāvaṇa: (1) Jhulana-yātrā: begins at the Samāj Bāṛī and Gaurāṅga Mandira on the first day of the light fortnight of the month and runs for the full fifteen days of that fortnight. The first ten days are marked by extra decoration (veśa = dress) for the images of the temples. For the last five days, these images, plus those of many other temples, are decorated as follows: 11th: in dancing dress; 12th: in the dress of a dancing king; 13th: in the dress of a cowherd; 14th: in female disguise; and 15th: as a king. The images are also placed on a swing and given a ride. The Govinda Bāṛī observes this festival for the last five days only.

Bhādra: (1) Janmāṣṭami: the eighth day of the dark half of the month is celebrated as the birthday of Kṛṣṇa.

(2) Nandan Utsava: the next day a special bhoga is held in the Gaurāṅga Mandira in honour of Nanda, the chief of the cowherds, the foster father into whose care Kṛṣṇa's father Vāsudeva gave the infant on the night of his birth in order to avoid his murderous uncle Kansa in Mathurā. There is also kīrtana and a distribution of prasāda.

(3) Rādhāṣṭamī: on the eighth day of the dark half of the month, the image of Caitanya in the Gaurāṅga Mandira is dressed as Rādhā and Rādhā pūjā is performed at this temple plus the Samāj and Govinda Bāṛīs.

Áśvina: (1) Durgā Pūjā is celebrated in various parts of the town and in private worship. There are no special observances in the main temples.

Kārtika: (1) Ānnakurta is held the day after Kālī Pūjā. In the Gaurāṅga Mandira, Samāj and Govinda Bāṛīs a special bhoga is offered as the ānnakurta (mountain of food), which is then distributed as prasāda.

(2) Gosthaṣṭamī: the silver footwear of Caitanya are taken in procession on a 12 mile parikramā of the town, carried on a silver throne. The procession stops at the Samāj Bāṛī, where the footwear are taken inside and a special bhoga is offered. It stops at the Govinda Bāṛī, then proceeds to Malañca-paṛa, to the house of Viṣṇupriyā, where a pūjā to Caitanya and Viṣṇupriyā is offered, as well as a bhoga of pounded rice (chīra). From the latter comes the alternative name for the festival - Chīra Utsava.

Agrahāyaṇa: (1) Rāsa-yātrā: on the pūrṇīmā day; the Rāsa-līlā of Kṛṣṇa concerns his dancing with 16,000 Gopīs simultaneously, but as celebrated in Navadvip, it is a Śākta festival. Images of a temporary nature are erected on many street corners. Several days later (on the day of bhaṅgā (broken) Rāsa), there is a procession and the images are thrown into the Ganges. The images are mainly those of the goddess in many forms: Gaṅgā-Mā, Gaurāṅgini, Mahiṣamardinī, Bhadrakālī, Dakṣiṇa Kālī, Ranikālī, Bhuvaneśwari, Ranacaṇḍi, Ānnapūrnā and Vāmā Kālī were to be seen in 1977. There were also images of Hanumān, Śiva, Hari-Hara (Śiva and Viṣṇu combined) and Kṛṣṇa-Kālī (Kṛṣṇa and Kālī combined). The procession is accompanied by the drinking of wine by the young men and much aggressive and provocative dancing. There were numerous fights, several stabbings and one death when I observed this festival. It then became clear why the pacifist Vaiṣṇavas prefer to observe the Rāsa procession in Vaiṣṇava Santipur.

Pauṣa: (1) From the first to the fifteenth of the month the footwear of Caitanya are moved from the main temple to the older, smaller temple

within the compound, while the image is painted (on alternating years by a designated family of artisans from Malañca-para, and by the Manipuris).

(2) Pauṣa Saṅkrānti: the last day of this month is an auspicious time for bathing in the Ganges, and people come to Navadvip for this purpose on this day.

Māgha: (1) Sarasvatī Pūjā: celebrated in the ṭols, educational institutions and temple of Poramā, in propitiation of the goddess of knowledge.

(2) Viṣṇupriyā's birthday: The same day as Sarasvatī Pūjā; from the Mangala ārati in the morning throughout the day the pūjā in the Gaurāṅga Mandira is offered to Viṣṇupriyā. The image of Caitanya is dressed as Viṣṇupriyā to make this possible. There is all day kīrtana, and in the evening, the footwear of Caitanya are taken, accompanied by kīrtana, to the house of Viṣṇupriyā for pūjā and kīrtana, then are returned to their temple.

(3) Māgha pūrṇimā: in the Govinda Bāṛī, the image is anointed with 108 pitchers of Ganges water and homa (fire sacrifice) is performed.

(4) Dhūlot: from the seventh day of the month to the fourth day after the pūrṇimā (i.e., twelve days) there are kīrtana, scriptural recitations and similar events. On the final day there is parikrāma from the Gaurāṅga Mandira through the streets of the town, accompanied by kīrtana, returning to the Gaurāṅga Mandira. While en route, the processionists gather the dust (dhūlī, hence the name of the celebration) of the streets, which was sanctified by the touch of Caitanya, and rub it on their bodies. After their parikrāma, participants go to the Ganges, bathe with soap and then oil themselves, return to the temple to take the prasāda, then proceed home.

Phālguna: (1) Dola-yātrā: the pūrṇimā day is celebrated as the birthday of Caitanya. Kīrtana begins four days before this. On the evening of the

full moon, devotees (particularly women) gather at the Gaurāṅga Mandira, then go to the Ganges where they fill 108 brass pitchers with water, and march in procession back to the temple. The wooden image cannot be bathed with water, so they bathe a stone sacred to Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa sīlā) in the temple. This is followed by the daśa-ārati. The name comes from the fact that in the past, this special ārati was performed by ten (daśa) Goswamys, although now more take part. Caitanya is dressed in red cloth and the clothing of a small child, with flowers and the crown of a newborn child. There is a special paiśa (sweet rice) bhoga before the evening ārati, and this is distributed to all as prasāda. The Goswamys performing the daśa-ārati fast from morning, and break their fast on this prasāda. The various organisations of Navadvip sponsor parikramās for Dola. The Gauḍīya Maṭha leads an assembly to two of the nine islands on each of four days, and one on the pūrṇimā day. At the head of their procession is the image of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa from the maṭha shrine. The Bharatsevāśrama and many of the small institutions take out parikramās with their followers.

(2) Caitanya's annaprāśana: the next day[1] is celebrated as the day of Caitanya's taking his first solid food. The image is presented with toys, and an elaborate meal of fifty-six items is prepared and offered in silver vessels. The prasāda of this offering is highly valued by pilgrims. The Samāj Bāṛī holds a parikramā on this day.

(3) 'Chodo Madol': the next day is the day of fourteen (chodo) drums (madol), named after Caitanya's practice of going on parikramā with seven groups of kīrtana singers, each with two drums. Many of Navadvip's Vaiṣṇava institutions, such as the maṭhas, āśramas and ākhāḍās, now send

[1]The annaprāśana of a child is usually held when it is about six months old. When questioned about holding this rite on the day after Caitanya's birth celebration, one Goswamy replied: "A day is the same as a year to a deity."

contingents to the Gaurāṅga Mandira, so that the number of drums far exceeds the fourteen. The footwear of Caitanya are taken out to accompany this round.

Caitra: (1) The Gajan festival is celebrated in Navadvip at each of the seven Śiva temples of the town. On the 26th of the month, all those who have taken vows of temporary sannyāsa bring their own small liṅgas to Poramā. They dance and perform kīrtana, then go en masse down to the Ganges to bathe. From there they return to one of the seven Śiva temples. Play, especially mock battles with staves (lāthis), continues all night. On the day of the Gajan, there is a procession with thorns, and khela-japa (jumping on the thorns). The participants then take a real human skeleton[1] to a tree in the bazar, perform a small pūjā, then carry the skeleton to the Jagannātha temple where rituals to Śiva and the skeleton are performed. This lasts until about 3 A.M., when the skeleton is taken to the temple of Poramā, with dancing, singing and drumming. The third day, Phala, is observed with fruit offerings. The sannyāsis also observe Nīla and Chaḍak before removing their robes and ending their period of vows.

e. Pilgrims

The streets and lanes of Navadvip are almost always crowded with the flow of pilgrims. Simply dressed, usually in whites, perhaps bearing the banner of their organisation, but almost always wearing a symbolic mark

[1]Basu (1962:161-62) describes a related rite in the Gajan of Kanchanpur village in Burdwan District. There the temporary sannyāsis of the village worship Śiva as Śmaśāneśvara (lord of the cremation ground) with an "outlandish, terrible and mad dance of the ascetics with heads of human corpses in one hand and swords in the other... There are heads of all sorts, of both sexes and different ages, and most of the heads are fresh with their eyes still glaring." Bhattacharyya (1972:61) reports that a dummy representing a corpse was carried in a "cremation dance" in Murshidabad District during a village Gajan.

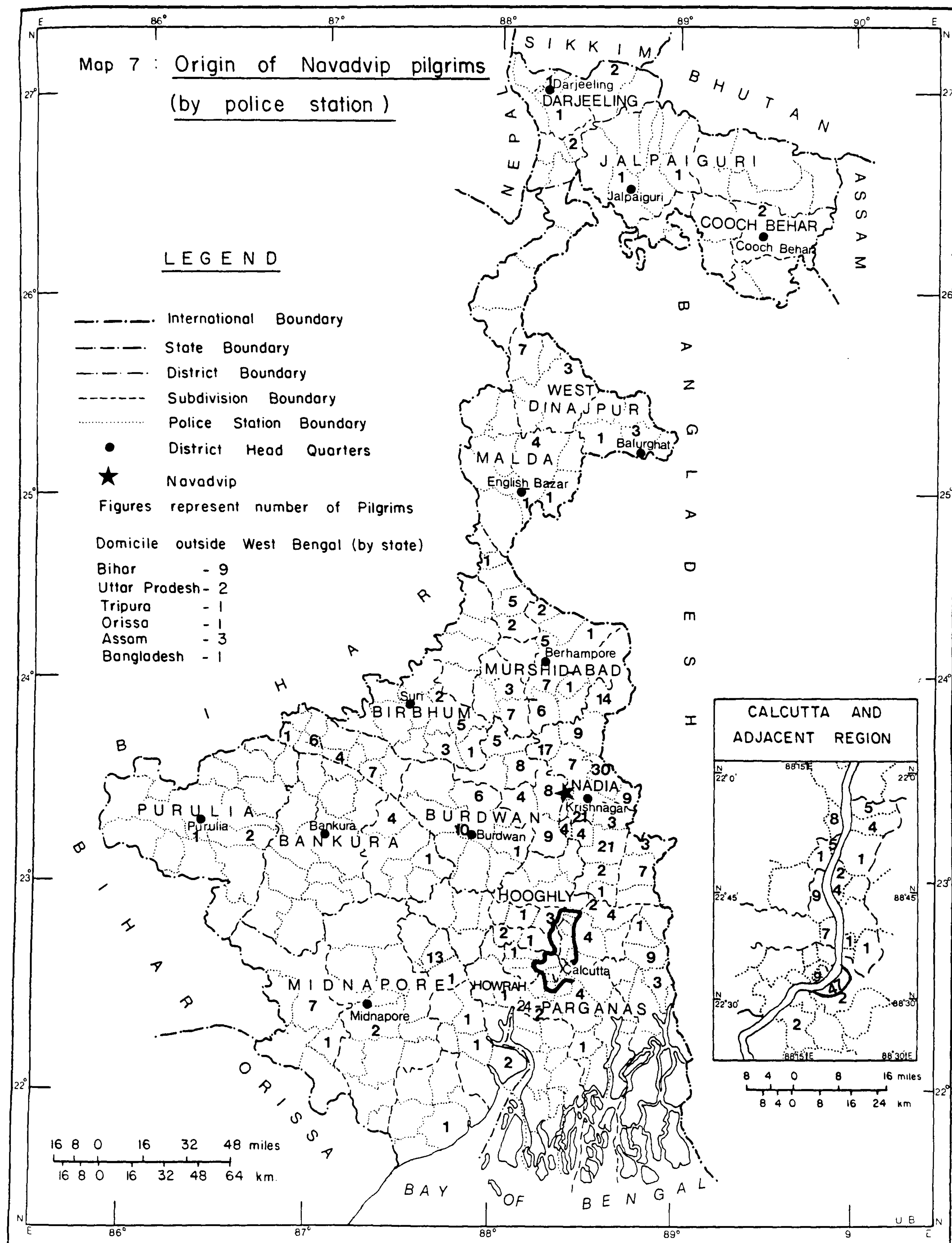
of Vaiṣṇavism on their foreheads and a mālā (rosary) of tulasī beads in hand, their lips move in silent repetition of the names of Kṛṣṇa. They wander about the sacred Gaura-maṇḍala, seek out the places where the dust was consecrated by the touch of the feet of holy men and offer the many accepted kinds of devotion. Their principal (although not exclusive) aim is to have a darśana of the sacred feet (śrī caraṇa) or the lotus feet (padma-pada) of Caitanya, that is, to offer obeisance to Śrī Kṛṣṇa as incarnated at Navadvip. In the course of their prostrations, singing, worship, offering, bathing, etc., they imbibe the legends of Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya and the other revered individuals of the cult, and they mingle with those who share with them their quest for perfected devotion, or have achieved expertise in the life of bhakti.

Pilgrims to Navadvip are almost exclusively from Bengal.[1] Of the 506 pilgrims interviewed in the sample (Appendix B), 500 stated Bengali to be their mother-tongue. Only 17 were resident outside West Bengal (Map 7), and most of these were Bengalis domiciled outside the state.

The interviewees were found to be disproportionately from higher status caste groups. Brāhmaṇs made up 17.8% of the sample and Kāyasthas 20.9%. The number of caste groups found in the sample was 41, with the addition of one Muslim, one Jain and one tribal (Bhūmij). The four higher status castes accounted for 44.7% (226) of the total sample. Middle caste pilgrims numbered 187 (36.9%) and low-status castes 77 (15.2%). Two pilgrims named Vairāgi as their caste, which is interesting as Bhandarkar (1913:86)

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[1]It is regretted that one category of pilgrims evident in Navadvip could not be included in the sample. Manipuris, who have been discussed earlier in the chapter, were to be found in Navadvip, but no method was found to bridge the language barrier. They spoke Bengali not at all, despite the fact that some among them were able to recite Vaiṣṇava texts which they had memorised by heart in the original Bengali. It must simply be noted that small numbers of Manipuris do make pilgrimage to Navadvip.



Map 7 : Origin of Navadvip pilgrims (by police station)
LEGEND
International Boundary
State Boundary
District Boundary
Subdivision Boundary
Police Station Boundary
District Head Quarters
Navadvip
Figures represent number of Pilgrims
Domicile outside West Bengal (by state)
Bihar - 9
Uttar Pradesh - 2
Tripura - 1
Orissa - 1
Assam - 3
Bangladesh - 1
SIKKIM
BHUTAN
NEPAL
ASSAM
BANGLADESH
BIHAR
ORISSA
BAY OF BENGAL
DARJEELING
Darjeeling
JALPAIGURI
Jalpaiguri
COOCH BEHAR
Cooch Behar
WEST DINAJPUR
Balurghat
MALDA
English Bazar
MURSHIDABAD
Berhampore
BIRBHUM
Suri
NADIA
Krishnagar
PURULIA
Purulia
BANKURA
Bankura
BURDWAN
Burdwan
HOOGHLY
HOWRAH
Calcutta
MIDNAPORE
Midnapore
24-PARGANAS
CALCUTTA AND ADJACENT REGION
16 8 0 16 32 48 miles
16 8 0 16 32 48 64 km.
8 4 0 8 16 miles
8 4 0 8 16 24 km

identifies this group as a branch of the Vaiṣṇavas which rejects caste. Their anti-caste attitude has been turned into the defining feature of their own grouping within the caste system.

The overwhelming Vaiṣṇava orientation of the sample is indicated by the fact that 296 pilgrims (58.5%) claimed to be initiated as Vaiṣṇavas or to be inclined towards the cult. Only 50 (9.9%) stated Śākta to be their cult, and 36 (7.1%) Śaiva. The balance (121:23.9%) claimed no cult orientation.

A large group of pilgrims (179:35.4%) had no education at all. Class VII had been completed by 60 (11.9%) and Class X by another 65 (12.8%). Fifty pilgrims had matriculated. There were 32 (6.3%) whose education had gone beyond secondary school but not to the point of the completion of a degree. Bachelor's or master's degrees were held by 105 (20.8%) pilgrims. Only one pilgrim claimed a traditional Sanskrit education.

Of the sample, 47 (9.3%) were from Calcutta and another 74 (14.6%) were from smaller urban municipalities. In total, then, 23.9% of the pilgrims to Navadvip were residents of urban areas.

The non-urban majority of Navadvip pilgrims is reflected in the occupational statistics. Agriculture supported 123 (24.3%) of the interviewees. Only 64 (12.6%) were employed in private sector enterprises. Government clerical and technical work accounted for 149 (29.4%) of the pilgrims, many of whom were therefore members of the rural governmental work-force (e.g., health, police, development, railways, irrigation, postal services, etc.). There were 92 (18.2%) self-employed businessmen.

The purposes for pilgrimage to Navadvip indicated by pilgrims reveal the cult-orientation of the town. Only 11 pilgrims (2.2%) were making vows in Navadvip and 6 of these were to Poramā. Of the 8 pilgrims (1.6%) fulfilling vows, only 4 had made their vows to Caitanya. In contrast, 347

pilgrims (68.6%) sought a sighting (darśana) of Caitanya. Almost the same number would offer a pūjā to Poramā (345), but with no vows. Other devotional practices stated by pilgrims as purposes for their jātrā were temple darśana (190; 37.5%), Navadvip dhāma-darśana (158; 31.2%), darśana of the images of Rāsa-yātrā (101; 20%), participating in the festivities of Dola-yātrā (48; 9.5%), performing kīrtana (6), darśana of Nityānanda (2), Rādhā-Govinda (1) or Mayapur (3). Six pilgrims sought the darśana of their gurus or of sādhus. Two pilgrims had come to Navadvip or be initiated by a guru.

Pilgrims also came to Navadvip because of its location on the Ganges River. Death rituals which required a bath were being performed by 29 of the pilgrims (5.7%).[1] In total 182 (36%) were planning to bathe in the river, particularly on the auspicious pūrṇīmās and eclipses (one of which took place during the interviewing period). One pilgrim was bathing at the end of the death pollution period, another one in absolution for the sin of killing a cow, five were bathing in the Ganges for the removal of birth pollution, and two for ritual cleansing after having been to the cremation ground.

Another group of pilgrims had come to Navadvip seeking the general boons of family welfare (56; 11.1%), mental peace (3), and one for job promotion. Two had been attracted by Navadvip's reputation as a centre of learning and six claimed to be in Navadvip for tour purposes only.

Rituals to be performed in Navadvip reflect the overwhelmingly devotional nature of pilgrimage there. Of the 347 pilgrims who stated that they had come to Navadvip for reasons of devotion to Caitanya

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[1]One reason for preferring the performances of death rituals at the Ganges rather than at home, according to several pilgrims, was that by doing the rituals away from home, under pretext of the more perfect purity of the place, they avoided the expense of feasting family and friends as they would have had to do had they performed the rituals at home.

108 (31.1% of 347) intended to offer a pūjā at the temple of Gaurāṅga, 17 (4.9%) at Govinda Bāṛī and 15 (4.3%) at the shrine of Soṇār Gaurāṅga. The balance (247; 48.9%) sought only to be in the divine presence of Caitanya.[1] A number of these in the latter group, as well as those with vows or those performing purificatory rituals at the Ganges, also intended to offer a pūjā to Poramā. Only one pilgrim was found to be performing the annaprāśana ceremony with the prasāda of the Gaurāṅga Mandira. Six pilgrims were performing an offering of devotional songs and the same number were tourists who were performing no rites at all.

Many pilgrims tied their visit to Navadvip with visits to other places. First among these was Mayapur, which attracted 398 (78.7%) of the sample. Santipur, sacred as the town of Advaita, but also the site of the end of the Rāsa festival, drew 38 pilgrims. Other sacred places such as Kardah (1), Tribeni (1), Tarapith (2) and Kamarpukur (4) were also visited by pilgrims, as were the much-visited university of Santiniketan (9) and the newly built Farrakka Barrage Dam in Malda (4). Secular sight-seeing is not infrequently included in visits to holy places. It can be noted as well that while few pilgrims spent the night en route from home to Navadvip (41; 8.1%), the majority spent at least one night in the sacred place itself (296; 58.5%). The latter statistic may simply reflect the large number of places to see and events in which to participate in Navadvip.

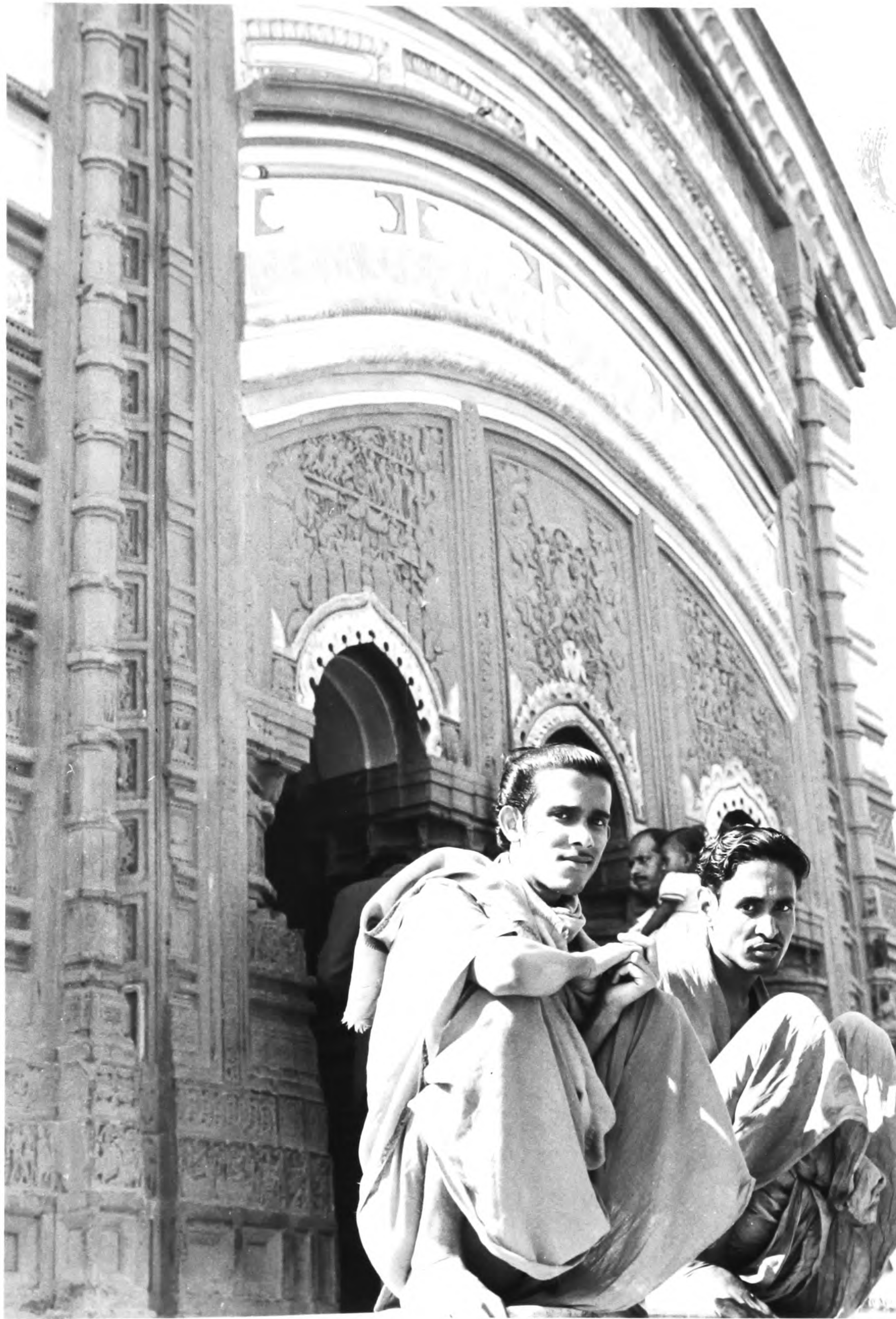
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[1]Devotion usually involves prostration to the deity, in a remarkable manner. The pilgrim always lies down on his stomach with his left side facing the deity. This is done because the deities of Vaiṣṇava shrines are always placed in this order: as one faces them, from left to right, guru of the master of the shrine, then Kṛṣṇa (in some form), then Rādhā (in the aspect which accompanies the particular form of Kṛṣṇa). The order is summarised as guru-iṣṭa-śakti. One honours first the guru, who has shown the way, then the deities, with Kṛṣṇa first as supreme. One may reverse the order, and turn the right shoulder to the images, if one wants to honour Rādhā in particular. Pilgrims will also circumambulate the image through small passages behind the shrine, provided for that purpose, offer a coin, recite a mantra, etc.

Visits to Navadvip by organised tour groups contribute to the number of pilgrims visiting more than just Navadvip on their pilgrimage. Twelve of the pilgrims in the sample had come to Navadvip with such a group: five industrial employees' groups, two religious groups, two school parties, a town recreation club, a youth society and a hospital staff association. The rest of the pilgrims were visiting primarily in small family groups. Parties consisting of members of one family numbering four and fewer accounted for 321 pilgrims, or 63.4% of the total. Another 49 (9.7%) were in mixed family and friends groups, 36 (7.1%) with friends and only 29 (5.7%) were travelling alone.

The majority of the pilgrims to Navadvip had never been there before (360; 71.1%). Of the remainder, 90 (17.8%) had been once or twice. The most commonly stated interval since the last visit was more than four years (57; 39% of the returnees) indicating a low incidence of repeated visits to Navadvip.

These statistics, in summary, reveal that pilgrimage to Navadvip is predominantly performed by higher caste, country-dwellers who come to Navadvip in small family groups for the purpose of offering devotion. But this generalisation glosses over the very many other functions and attributes of the sacred centre which attract fewer but still significant numbers of pilgrims -- the Śakta goddess Poramā, the sacred Ganges River, the fame of Navadvip as a centre of learning and even the sahib-maṭha ('monastery of the foreigners') at Mayapur. There are many facets to this place of pilgrimage, and each invites its own form of patronage or utilisation. Nevertheless, the dominant characteristic of the pilgrim population of Navadvip is their devotion to Caitanya, the moon of Navadvip, and the Vaiṣṇava cult.



Tarapith: Priests before Tārā's Temple

CHAPTER VI

TARAPITH

The site of the pīṭha of goddess Tārā is a small rural village in Birbhum District. Located adjacent to a minor paved road, the village is, in all respects but one, an unremarkable rural settlement. Houses are made of mud with thatched roofs. They are set behind tall mud walls and are built around courtyards. A narrow unpaved track leads from the access road to the temple at the heart of the village and, besides this track, no thoroughfare in the village is wide enough to accommodate anything larger than people or domestic animals. The typical life of a Bengali village swirls around its anomalous feature, accompanied by the sounds of rural social life, the play of children and the barking of dogs.

The feature which sets Tarapith[1] apart from the thousands of other villages in Bengal is its sacred zone. Above the village houses rises the large temple to Tārā, which can be made out from a distance as one approaches the village from Rampurhat, the nearest railway station, six miles distant to the north-west. Across the small road from the temple and reaching down to the river Dwaraka is the sacred grove which is the śmaśāna (cremation ground). And lining the street which runs between the two are the āśramas, food stalls, souvenir shops and pūjā-requisite vendors

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[1]The name of the village is actually Tārā-pīṭha, sometimes Tarapur. It was previously called Chandipur, before the village took the name of the temple. It is located at 24°6'N. and 87°48'E., approximately 290 miles north of Calcutta. Its population in 1961 was 508 and in 1971 was 683.

which attend the temple. The sacred zone is not large, but dominates the village. It is now expanding as the volume of pilgrims to Tarapith steadily increases.

Only one classical source -- the Śivacarita -- considers Tarapith as a mahāpīṭha (great seat) of the goddess, where the eye of Satī fell (relating to the Bengali tārā: cornea[1]) (Sircar 1973:39). In the Śivacarita the goddess is Tāriṇi, identified with the present-day Tārā. The citing of Tarapith in only one of the many listings of Śākta pīṭhas has resulted in controversy over its status vis-à-vis other temples of the goddess. The priests of the Tārā temple are adamant in defending its ranking as one of the 51 great pīṭhas, but others, especially the priests of other nearby pīṭhas, disparage this claim. Regardless, the number of pilgrims flowing to this relatively inaccessible rural shrine, as well as the social structural features of the sacred area, result in its existence today as an important seat of goddess worship. It was chosen for study from among all of the pīṭhas of Bengal because its temple has achieved widespread fame as a Śākta pīṭha, resulting in importance as a place of pilgrimage. Within the place itself, one can find all of the significant features of a Śākta pīṭha.

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[1]Monier-Williams (1964:444) identifies the pupil of the eye as tārā in Sanskrit.

a. Foundation Narrative

(i) The Legend

In the Satya-yuga (the first of the four eras) the great sage Vaśiṣṭha, son of Brahmā, was in Kāmākhya, Assam, engaged in meditation on Ugratārā (the devī Tārā in a fierce (ugra)[2] manifestation). He failed to achieve the siddhis (powers) he sought, and so cursed the Tārā-mantra he was practising, saying "You shall never be fruitful quickly." This angered Tārā, who in turn cursed Vaśiṣṭha: "You shall not achieve your cherished goal in this birth." Tārā then drove Vaśiṣṭha from Kāmākhya. He wandered here and there, but could not achieve siddhis because he had polluted the Tārā-mantra by his misunderstanding of the grace of the goddess. Vaśiṣṭha (some say in the same life, some in the next) then appealed to his father Brahmā for guidance. Brahma advised Vaśiṣṭha to proceed to China and there to find Buddha in the guise of Janārdana. Vaśiṣṭha did as his father suggested, and Buddha directed him to persist in his worship of Tārā, but in the Chinese mode, using wine, flesh and sexual intercourse.[3] Vaśiṣṭha at first refused to do so, but relented when Buddha told him there was no other way.

Buddha sent Vaśiṣṭha back to India, directing him to practise his Tārā-mantra and left-handed Tantrism in a place on the east bank of the Dwaraka River, north-east of Bakreswar pīṭha and east of Vaidyanātha-dhāma. Vaśiṣṭha found this place. He seated himself on an āsana (seat) of five human skulls beneath a śimul (silk-cotton) tree and repeated the Tārā-mantra three lakh (300,000) times. When Tārā was satisfied by this performance, she offered Vaśiṣṭha a boon. He elected to see her as Janārdana had described her to him: with a fierce appearance, having Śiva seated on her knee sucking her breast. Thus she appeared to him. Her manifestation then turned to stone, creating the image which remains at Tarapith to the present.

The stone image of Ugratārā which was seen by Vaśiṣṭha had actually existed before that time. The eye of Satī (some say the third or spiritual eye) which fell to earth at Tarapith turned to stone and sprang up in the form of the image which Vaśiṣṭha saw. This statue relates to the story of Śiva (as Nīlakaṇṭha) having saved Creation by drinking poison which had emerged from the ocean after it had been

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[1]The story as retold here was collected from oral sources in Tarapith.

[2]Ugra is defined as powerful, violent, mighty, impetuous, strong, huge, formidable, terrible; high, noble; cruel, fierce, ferocious, savage; angry, passionate, wrathful (Monier-Williams 1964:172).

[3]i.e., the 'left-handed' (vāmācāra) or Chinese (cīnācāra) form of Tantrism, which is highly esoteric.

churned. He was stricken with burning in the throat from the poison, which caused his throat to turn blue (hence nīla (blue) kaṇṭha (throat)). To relieve the burning, Śakti offered Śiva her breast, which he took and was relieved.

Vaśiṣṭha installed the image of Tārā in a temple and promised that 11,000 seekers would achieve siddhis under the śimul tree by repeating the Tārā-mantra three lakh times, until the middle of the Kālī-yuga, when the tree would disappear and siddhis would no longer be granted.

Some time after this event, the temple to Tārā was destroyed by the floodwaters of the Dwaraka and the image of Tārā was lost. The glory of Tarapith sank low and the place became unknown.

The River Dwaraka was at one time wider than it is today, and so bore the boats of merchants who traded throughout Bengal and beyond. About 600 years ago, one such merchant, named Jaya Datta, of Rathnagar, plied the Dwaraka, and on one trip took along his only son. One day his son suddenly developed acute diarrhoea and died. Jaya Datta was beside himself with grief. Despite his anguished beseeching of the gods and goddesses, his son did not revive. Jaya Datta moored his boats on the east bank of the Dwaraka and ordered a funeral pyre to be built. Some of his sailors set about this work while others prepared their evening meal. Some fish had been caught during the day, and these were being prepared for cooking. One sailor, seated by a pond a short distance from the river, took a fish, cut it into pieces and then put the pieces into the tank for washing. Miraculously, all of the pieces of the fish rejoined themselves and the fish swam away. These events were conveyed to Jaya Datta, who immediately took up his dead son's body and carried it to the tank. He submerged his son, who immediately returned to life and cried "Tārā." Thus did Jaya Datta rediscover the seat of Tārā in Birbhum on the caturdaśī (fourteenth) day of the bright fortnight (śukla pakṣa) of Aśvina month. He built a temple at that place and appointed Bhairava Ṭhākur of Mahula the first sevāit of the temple. The tank where this miracle took place still bears the name Jiyata Kuṇḍa (the living pond).

During the construction of the temple commissioned by Jaya Datta, the stone image worshipped by Vaśiṣṭha was uncovered and recognised. Jaya Datta had this image installed as the deity in the temple.

(ii) Analysis of the Narrative

The Buddha-Vaśiṣṭha legend is not unique to Tarapith. This legend is recounted in the Tārā-tantra, but the author of the English introduction to this Sanskrit text[1] states that the legend derives from earlier Tantric

[1] A. K. Maitra, Introduction to Tārā-Tantram, Pandit Purandara Kavyatirtha, Ghoramara (Rajshahi), 1913, pp.22-23. The Brahmayāmala is dated to the 8th century B.C. (Bagchi 1939:102).

texts: the Rudrayāmala, the Brahmayāmala and the Smara Dipikā of Minanātha. All three of these works, and the Tārā-tantra, assert that the worship of Tārā was introduced into India by Vaśiṣṭha from a country called Mahācina (i.e., China), beyond the Himalayas. The story told at Tarapith is a close approximation of this literary myth, except for the addition of the fact that Vaśiṣṭha, on his return to India from China, made his residence at Tarapith. One epithet of Tārā makes reference to the Chinese origins of Tārā worship: Mahācīnatārā.

The story as told at Tarapith integrates the Buddha-Vaśiṣṭha legend with the conventional Dakṣa-yajña myth which justifies its claim to status as a Śākta-pīṭha. Taken together, the two myths account for Tarapith's present character as both a Śākta-pīṭha among the 51 and, more particularly, as a Tantric siddha-pīṭha of cīnācāra practices.

The placing of Tārā in Tarapith was a divine act caused by the dismemberment of Satī's body. The presence of the deity at this spot was revealed to men because of the actions which won the favour of the deity. Tārā did not come to Vaśiṣṭha, rather Vaśiṣṭha was directed to practise his sādhanā at a place known by an enlightened being (Buddha) to be the seat of the goddess. Vaśiṣṭha's success demonstrated that which existed in the place which he revealed, but did not create. There is thus no conflict between the origin of Tarapith in the Satī myth and the revelation of its suitability for sādhanā by Vaśiṣṭha. Thus the association of the deity with this particular seat is placed beyond the works and wishes of man.[1]

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[1]The assertion that it was Satī's third (i.e., spiritual) eye which fell at Tarapith provides a direct symbolic linkage betwen physiology and spirituality, and thus between the two aspects of the pīṭha as a place of Satī's body and of spiritual achievements.

Tārā is both a Hindu and a Buddhist deity.[1] She is a minor Hindu goddess, but is of much greater significance in the Buddhist pantheon. That the story of Vaśiṣṭha should tell of his going to China and learning spiritual practices may indicate something of the relationship between these two Tārās. This aspect of the story may preserve facts of the historical transmission of the worship of this goddess from Buddhism to Hinduism, although this conjecture cannot be verified.[2]

The practices which Vaśiṣṭha learned in China and carried to India and which yielded him siddhis are part of Tantric sādhanā.[3] Tantrism is an esoteric stream of Hindu thought and practice which is kept especially concealed since some of its procedures are of questionable morality, according to more orthodox Hindu views.[4] The goal of practices in the Tantric vein is direct revelation of the deity. This is accomplished by the perfection of certain rituals under the guidance of a guru. Buddha initiated

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[1]cf. D. C. Sircar (ed.), The Śakti Cult and Tārā, University of Calcutta Press, Calcutta, 1967, containing articles on Buddhist Tārā.

[2]Ghosh (1957:296) implausibly attributes the initiation of Tārā worship at Tarapith to an invasion of India by the Tibetans in the 7th century, with an ensuing revival of Tantrism and hence Tārā worship. K.K. Dasgupta (1967) argues that the Buddhist Tārā was derived from the Brahminical-Hindu Tārā. D. C. Bhattacharya (1967:141-42) concurs with the latter view.

[3]"Siddhi is produced by sādhanā. The former term, which literally means 'success,' includes accomplishment, achievement, success, and fruition of all kinds. A person may thus gain siddhi in speech, siddhi in mantra, etc. A person is siddha also who has perfected his spiritual development. The various powers attainable...are known as the eight siddhis...The great siddhi is spiritual perfection. Even the mighty powers of the 'eight siddhis' are known as the 'lesser siddhi' since the greatest of all siddhis is full liberation (mahānirvāṇa) from the bonds of phenomenal life..."(Woodroffe 1963:152.).

[4]"The rites practised by the Vāmāchāris are so grossly obscene, as to cast into shade the worst invention which the most impure imagination can conceive (unbridled debauchery with wine and women)" H. H. Wilson, Calcutta Review, XLVII, March, 1885, 34.

Vaśiṣṭha into pañca-makara, the ritual use of the five 'M's' of Tantrism. These are madya (wine), mānsa (flesh), matsya (fish), mudra (position) and maithuna (sexual intercourse). These are considered to be aspects of the material world which the sādhaka manipulates in ritual and thereby overcomes, achieving liberation from their grasp.[1] The story of Vaśiṣṭha's initiation in China and his perfection of Tantric practices in Tarapith accounts mythically for the existence of these traditions in Tarapith today.

The presence in Tarapith of Śakti, particularly as Ugratārā, is also attributed to the actions of Vaśiṣṭha. The usual iconography of Tārā does not present her as she was seen by Vaśiṣṭha, that is with Śiva at her breast. This unusual depiction, which is the form of one of the two images of Tārā in the Tarapith temple, is accounted for by the story of Vaśiṣṭha's wish to have darśana of this rūpa (appearance) of Śakti.

Śakti is, on the one hand, fierce and destructive, and, on the other, benign and nurturing. Both of these opposing traits of character are to be found in the deity of Tarapith as revealed in this story. She is Ugra (fierce) Tārā, who spat out a curse to match Vaśiṣṭha's and who is, as we shall see in greater detail in the discussion of the deity, indentical in ferocity to blood-thirsty Kālī. But Tārā is also the suckling mother who takes her devotee upon her knee and nurturingly removes all danger and pain, as she did with Śiva.

The story of Vaśiṣṭha provides the essential elements of a validating myth for Tarapith's main characteristics as a Śākta-pīṭha: the descent of a part of Satī's body, the revelation of the presence of the deity, the

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[1] cf. Bose and Haldar (1956:133ff.) for a discussion of the pañca-makara and their symbolic meaning; also Basu (1976).

explanation of the particular form which the goddess takes there, and the type of Śākta-pīṭha it is (i.e., a Tantric siddha-pīṭha).

The myth of Jaya Datta has no connection with the Vaśiṣṭha story. His rediscovery of the deity, and even of the original stone image, assumes a gap in time between these events and the life of Vaśiṣṭha. This story accounts for the present temple at Tarapith, which is said to have been continuously a place of worship to Tārā since Jaya Datta. The only important fact to be noted from this story is that the supernatural powers of the goddess, as associated with water, are related. Here the fierce Mother restores life -- the ultimate boon of divine power -- thus revealing her regenerative and creative potential.

b. The Deity

The goddesses of Bengal, particularly the more renowned Durgā and Kālī, but Tārā and others as well, are celebrated in songs known as śyāmā-saṅgīta, the Songs of the Dark One (a reference to the dark skin of Kālī). The offering of these songs is a popular form of devotion to the goddess. Several composers of devotional songs, especially Rāmaprasād and Caṇḍīdāsa, are highly revered by Bengalis for their compositions. The three songs that follow were written by Rāmaprasād, Gyan Bābū (organiser of the Vāmādeva Sangha Āśrama in Tarapith) and Gurupada Paṇḍā (an elderly priest of the Tarapith temple) respectively.[1]

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[1]Other verses to Tārā translated from Tārāshtakam are given in Arthur and Ellen Avalon, Hymns to the Goddess, Ganesh & Co., Madras, 1964, pp.50-55.

(i) Songs and Images

Song 1.

Tārā, do you remember any more?[1]
Mother, as I have lived happy, is there happiness hereafter?
Had Śiva's words been true, I should not be beseeching you.
After passing through delusion on delusion, I feel my right eyelid throbbing.
Had there been any other place, I should not have besought you.
But now, Mother, having given me hope, you have cut my bonds, you have lifted me to the tree's top.
Rāmaprasād says: My mind is firm, and my gift to the priest well made. Mother, my Mother, my all is finished. I have offered my gift.

Song 2.

Come, come to Tarapith,
If you want to see 'Mā',
Here you will get the touch of your own Mother,
There is no doubt about it.
Here there is no distinction of caste,
Because my Mā is the Mother of the universe,
Only call out 'Mā, Mā',
Mother will place you on her lap.
Come here and see,
Mother sitting with spread lap,
To relieve the burning sensation of poison,
She is breast-feeding Nīlakaṇṭha,[2]
If you come here you will see Vāmākhepā,
The Mother's darling son.
He ate with the jackals and the dogs,
Calling them his brothers,
To give rice to the hungry,
The mother is calling her children,
Wherever you may be,
Come, come, come here.

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[1] Thompson and Spencer (trans.) (1923:68-69).

[2] Śiva with a blue throat.

Song 3.

Come, come Tārā-mā,[1]
Come, Mother, within the twelve petals
Of the lotus of my heart,
My heart is in darkness, O Mother,
Come and illumine it,
Come, Śyāmā,[2] in the form of the Mother,
Leaving aside your fearful form.
Mahākāla, the most fearful of _kālas_[3]
He, too, lies under your feet.
The seeker knows your _līlā_,
Others do not understand this.
I call to you repeatedly at unsuitable times.
Says Gurupada, please appear before me, Mother,
In the lotus of my heart.

Mother Tāriṇi in the form of Ugratārā
You are seated at Tarapith,
Mother, I call to you day and night,
I have become tired of calling to you
And have lost direction,
I am sitting here waiting,
In the hope of seeing you, O Elokeśi[4]
Men like Vaśiṣṭha were very great,
What will happen to this poor child of yours, O Mother?
Says Gurupada, I, sitting here at Tarapith, will see
Where you go, Mother Kalyāṇī.[5]

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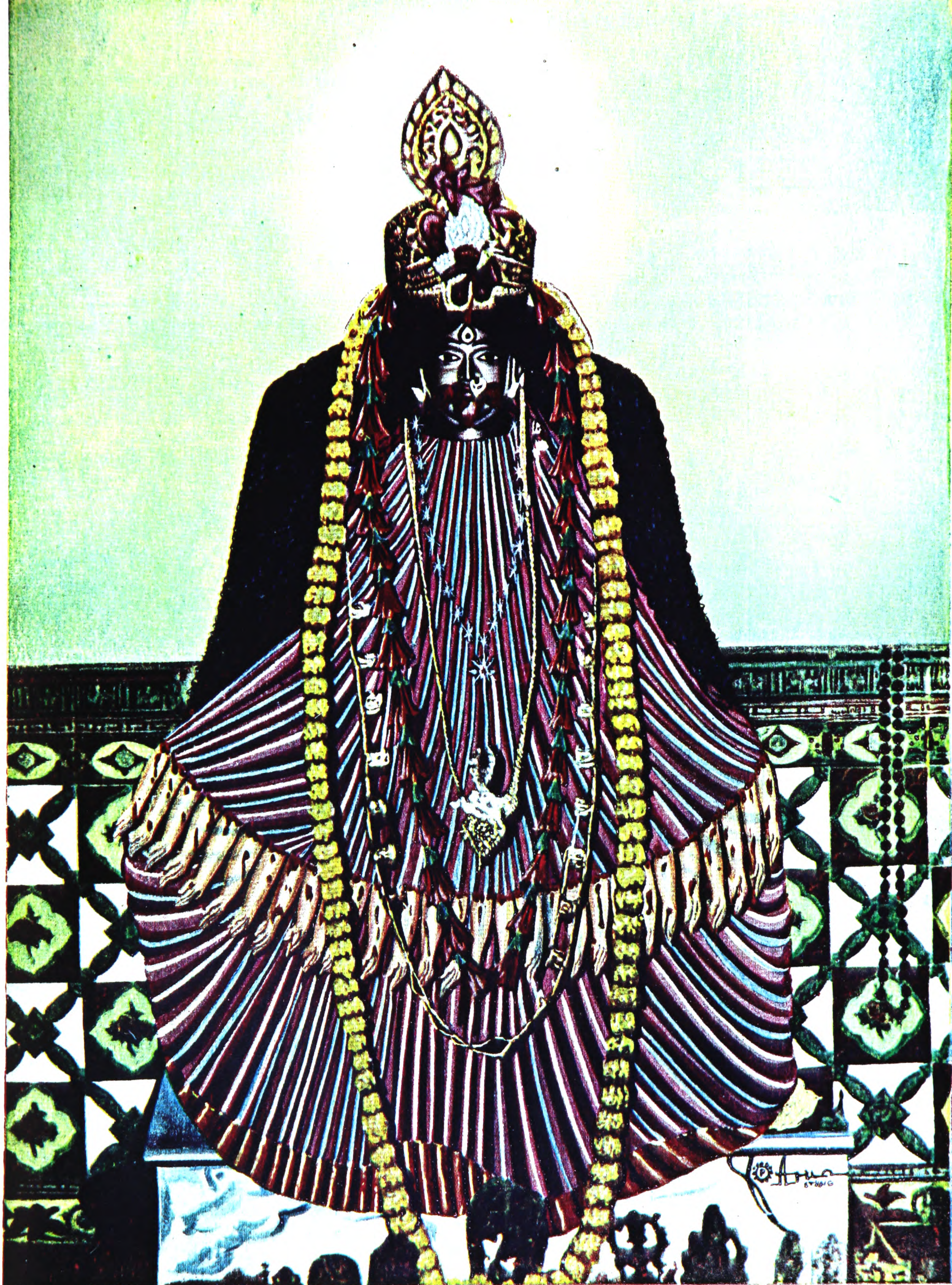
[1] The suffix _mā_ means mother.

[2] Śakti (the goddess).

[3] _Kāla_ can be translated as time, age or death; Mahākāla is therefore great time, age or death. Mahākāla is also a name for Śiva. This line can therefore be given a number of interpretations, e.g., Śiva, the most fearful of times; Śiva, the most fearful of deaths; the great death, the most fearful of times, etc.

[4] 'with loosened hair,' an epithet of a fierce manifestation of Śakti.

[5] Śakti as the doer of good.



শ্রী শ্রী৺রী তারামাতার অবিকল প্রতিচ্ছবি

Tara



শ্মশানে বামদেবের মাতৃদর্শন

Vāmākhepā's <u>darśana</u> of Tārā

(ii) Analysis of Songs and Images

Tārā is one of the Mahāvidyās, the ten most important goddesses of the Tantras.[1] These are the manifestations of Śakti representing transcendental knowledge (mahā: great, vidyā: wisdom). She is described in the Kālikā Purāṇa (chapter 63, lines 64-69):

64. (One should meditate on her as) having four arms, a black colour; as being adorned with a wreath of heads, holding in her two right hands a sword (above) and a blue lotus below;
65. and holding in her left a knife and a skull-bowl respectively; she herself wears one braid on her head, which scratches the sky;
66. she always wears a wreath of shaven human heads on her head and round her neck; she wears a snake as a necklace on her breast; she has red eyes;
67-68. she wears a black cloth around her loins; she is provided with a tiger's skin; her left foot she has put down on the heart of a corpse, and she has put her right foot on the back of a lion; she herself frequently licks the corpse; she laughs shrilly, is utterly horrible and very frightening, being provided with a conflagration.
69. Ugratārā should continually be meditated upon by devotees who long for happiness.

(Van Kooij 1972:127)

Bose and Haldar (1956:195-96) describe her somewhat differently:

> Tara is of dark blue complexion whereas Kali...is of dark colour, as sombre as the clouds at the time of universal dissolution. Tara places her left leg on the breast of Siva, who lies like a corpse. She is of short stature with a protruding belly. She has a terrible appearance and is dressed in tiger-skin. She wears on her neck a garland of severed human heads. She is in the prime of her youth and adorned with Panchamudras. She is possessed of four hands and her tongue is held out a bit. She wears a single braid of matted hair on her head. The Rishi Akshvya resides in her forehead. Her complexion is as effulgent as that of the newly rising sun. She is three-eyed. She stands in the midst of a funeral pyre. The range of her teeth is terrible. She is laughing, engrossed in her emotion, and is decked with ornaments worn by the women. She takes her stand on a white lotus in the midst of a wide expanse of water.

Tārā is terrible to look on and fierce. Her fierceness is emphasised in her epithet of Ugratārā: "the fearful Tārā is the deity of the 'destruction of a solar system' (surya-pralaya)."[2]

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[1]cf. Mookerjee and Khanna (1977:191).

[2]from Motilāl Sarmā Gaud, Daśa Mahā-vidyā, p.89, quoted in Daniélou (1964:27).

It may seem contradictory that the 'fierce' Tārā is singled out in the Kālikā Purāṇa for mention, not as a destroyer or giver of pain, but as the protectress:

> The wise seers here call her Ugratārā, for she always protects her devotees against danger, however terrible it may be.
> (ch.63, line 61: Van Kooij 1972:124)

> Ugratārā should continually be meditated upon by devotees who long for happiness.
> (ch.63, line 69, Van Kooij 1972:125)

It is this role of Ugratārā that the songs emphasise. Gurupada (Song 3) calls her Kalyāṇī, the doer of good. She "will place you on her lap," that is, will protect the devotee and save him from danger as she did by suckling Nīlakaṇṭha (Song 2). Her capacity to yield happiness, as mentioned in the Kālikā Purāṇa section quoted above, is echoed in the words of Rāmaprasād (Song 1, line 2). This creative, protective role is reminiscent of her regenerative actions in the story of Jaya Datta and, in fact, Tara has been called the "potential of re-creation."[1]

Tārā, as all aspects or manifestations of Śakti, has the dual character of being both the destroyer and creator. She is the blood-thirsty mother, giving both birth and death to the living. These complementary opposites do not figure equally in her character. It is as Kalyāṇī, the doer of good, who does good by witholding her power to destroy, or by destroying evil and danger, that Tārā is best known. The emphasis on Tārā as generator and regenerator is contained in the meaning of her name.

Several roots are identified as the source of the name Tārā. K.K. Dasgupta, discussing the Buddhist Tārā, states that the name derives from the root tār, to cross: "Figuratively, she helps her devotees to cross the sea of trouble..." (1967:115). In fact, the root of Tārā is tṝ: carrying

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[1]Mookerjee and Khanna (1977:191).

across or beyond; saving (Monier-Williams 1964:444). The Hindu Tārā as well is thought of as being responsible for a passage. The Taratyānasatārā says "She who brings us to the other shore..is Tārā." Another Tantra calls Tārā "the boat with the help of which the ocean of the world may be crossed" (quoted in Daniélou 1964:275). Van Kooij (1972:124) identifies the root of Tārā's name with <u>trā</u>, to protect, to save. This derivation refers to the symbolic essence of Tārā as a saviour. A third derivation connects Tārā with <u>tārā</u>, a star, i.e., luminous heavenly body. All three meanings place greater emphasis on the positive aspects of Tārā's character. So, too, does the legend of the destruction of the poison which was produced by the churning of the ocean.

The story of Nīlakaṇṭha is one of the earlier legends of the Purāṇas.[1] It is said in this legend that Śiva saved the world by destroying the poison that threatened it. The protective proclivity of Śiva in the Nīlakaṇṭha myth is shared by Tārā, who soothed Śiva after he had consumed the poison. The Tārā-tantra makes this association by shared characteristics even more explicit:

> O great goddess, without decaying, Śiva, the lord of sleep, drank the <u>hālāhala</u> poison, hence he is known as the Never-decaying (Akṣobhya). The transcendental power of illusion, ever in lustful dalliance with him, is the Star, Tārā.[2]

Tārā is not worshipped as widely in Bengal as other aspects of Śakti, such as Kālī and Durgā. There are few temples to Tārā, the one at Tarapith being the only one of importance in the state. The goddess is, however, identified as essentially one with all the other manifestations of Śakti, and so draws devotees who may not be devoted specifically to the Tārā goddess. This is especially true of Kālī, the more famous and widely worshipped fierce form of the goddess. Pilgrims to Tarapith in the month of

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[1] The legend is recounted in Bhattacharya (1975:802-08); see also Long (1976).

[2] Quoted in Daniélou (1964:276).

Pauṣa stated that they had chosen this time to make their pilgrimage because worship of Kālī in Pauṣa month is especially favoured, and the goddess of Tarapith was "Pauṣa Kālī." The identification of Tārā with Kālī is augmented by the fact that both Tārā and Kālī (along with Manasā) are believed to be jagrata (awake) goddesses. These three alone of the many goddesses are awake to the needs of humanity in the Kālī age.

The combination of fierce, destructive potentiality and motherly, succouring protectiveness in the symbolism of Tārā leads to an attitude of supplicating devotedness in her worshippers. Her willingness to save from danger is contingent on her witholding her destructiveness. The devotee propitiates her with offerings to encourage her to remember his needs. Rāmprasād begins his song with "Tārā, do you remember any more?" and ends with "I have offered my gift" (i.e., his devotion). Gurupada (Song 3) asks "Come...in the form of the Mother, leaving aside your fearful form." In fear and awe, the devotee gives offerings and requests Tārā for her blessings. As Daniélou (1964:276) says: "So long as food is provided, so long as offerings are poured into the fearful solar fire, the cosmic sun is at peace, but if food is lacking, the sun becomes the Fearful-Star (Ugra-Tārā) and devours the worlds."

The terrible, devastating side of Tārā's character invites submissive surrender by the helpless supplicant. Gurupada is "sitting here waiting" and Rāmaprasād is "beseeching" the Mother. The performance of child-like bhakti by Ramakrishna Paramahansa for his deity Kālī is taken as a model of Śākta devotedness. The song by Gyan Bābu refers to a saintly man of Tarapith named Vāmākhepā (or Vāmācaraṇa), whose actions in devotion were very much of a type with Ramakrishna's. Since the fame of Vāmākhepā is largely responsible for the increase in popularity of Tarapith in the

20th century, a brief look at this "son of Tārā" will reveal much of the nature of the deity he successfully approached.

The mad (khepā) Vāmā[1] was born near Tarapith in 1843, the son of a devoted Brāhmaṇ named Śarvānanda Chaṭṭopādhyāya. His childhood was spent in devotion to Tārā, building small images of sand, visiting the temple, offering flowers, etc. Following the death of his father in 1855, Vāmā was given some education and tried his hand at several occupations, but failed in everything because his mind was occupied only with thoughts of his goddess. He began to spend more of his time wandering in the cremation ground of Tarapith and keeping company with the sādhus who lived there. He received initiation from one Kailāśapati and undertook the recitation of the name of Tārā as his spiritual practice. He took the permission of his mother, left home, and took up full-time devotional service to Tārā in the cremation ground of Tarapith.

Until his death in 1911, Vāmākhepā remained in the Tarapith śmaśāna, except for one ill-fated pilgrimage to Benares. The stories of his life in the cremation ground are filled with incidents meant to inspire awe and devotion at the powers of Tārā, which her 'son' was able to draw upon. Several of these anecdotes will indicate the substance of the life of devotion of Vāmākhepā.

Soon after taking mantra-dīkṣā (initiation into the Tārā mantra),

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[1]Vāmā in Bengali means the direction 'left', and is an appelation given to Tantric practices which are considered highly esoteric and not for public performance, i.e., those of the vāmācari: the practices of the pañca-makara. Vāmākhepā's name has symbolic value in its direct association of the man with his spiritual practices. It also associates the saint as a madman with Unmatta, the mad bhairava of Tārā. Khepā is Bengali from the Sanskrit kṣepa: insulting, abusive. Several books have been published in Bengali on the life of Vāmākhepā. Chintaharan Chakravarti (1956:418) mentions two: Vāmā Kṣepā by Jatindranath Chatterjee and Śrī Vāmā Līlā by Haricharan Ganguly; there are also Mukhopādhyāya (1911) and Banerjee (1971).

Vāmākhepā was in deep meditation within the cremation ground. Seated among the skulls and bones of human bodies, accompanied by the howls and prowling of jackals, he meditated upon Tārā. Suddenly, before his eyes, a śimul tree in the śmaśāna unaccountably burst into flames. From out of the fire, Vāmākhepā saw a blue light, which assumed the form of Tārā, holding the khaḍga (sacrificial sword), the hooked sword of Kālī, the lotus and a human skull filled with nectar. Vāmā was spellbound. Tārā extended her arms and pulled Vāmā to her breast. This was Vāmā's darśana of Tārā. The next day, the charred trunk of a śimul tree stood in the cremation ground.[1]

Another story relates how Vāmākhepā went into the temple to offer bhoga to the deity. As he was about to make the offering, he began instead to eat it himself. The temple priest beat him mercilessly for this sacrilege, but Vāmā protested that Tārā was his mother, and she had offered to share her food with him. He then stood up saying "I do not accept your idol-image, whose face is made of metal; I do not accept your garland of skulls, made of metal. I only accept formless Tārā." And so saying, he urinated on the temple image of Tārā. It is said that Vāmā emerged from the temple with five finger marks on his back where Tārā had slapped him for showing her such disrespect.[2]

There are also many popular stories told in Bengal of the miracle-working powers conferred on Vāmākhepā by Tārā,. One story told by a temple priest concerns a sick man who was carried to the śmaśāna to be seen by Vāmā. The mad saint grabbed the sick man by the neck and strangled him until blood poured from his mouth. His illness never returned. Another incident

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[1]This incident is depicted in the small picture of Tārā and Vāmākhepā purchased in Tarapith and reproduced above.

[2]This story is a popular expression of the metaphysical paradox regarding Śakti's dual nature as both within and beyond form (cf. supra Ch.III).

occurred when a man came to the *śmaśāna* to hang himself because he could no longer bear the pain of a hernia. Vāmākhepā invited the man into his thatched hut and, before the man could defend himself, delivered several swift kicks to his middle. The man's pain disappeared instantly. It is also said that Vāmā could control the rains and had influence over the animals and ghosts that frequented the cremation ground.

Vāmākhepā is known as the son of Tārā, but also as Tarapith *bhairava*. Every Śākta goddess is accompanied by her *bhairava*, the counterpart aspect of Śiva. According to the Śivacarita, the *bhairava* of Tārā is Unmatta (the mad one). This was the role performed by Vāmākhepā. But his madness, and his irrational behaviour, are recounted now as stories of divine inspiration. Urinating on the Mother is taken to be a denigration of the limited tangible image of Tārā which he saw as nothing but material. Violence is healing and his companionship of animals inspired (Song 2). Vāmākhepā is described as being outwardly rough and fierce, but inwardly an ocean of mercy. This description is true of Ugratārā as well.

The attribution of divinity to madness continues into the present in Tarapith. Śaṅkar Bābā, a current resident of the *śmaśāna*, is indeed a madman who stalks about the village screeching unintelligibly in a falsetto voice. It is said by some priests and *sādhus* that Śaṅkar Bābā alone knows under which *śimul* tree the *āsana* (seat) of Vaśiṣṭha, where one can easily gain *siddhis*, is to be found. Others, perhaps dispairingly, say that the tree which was destroyed in the vision of Vāmākhepā was Vaśiṣṭha's tree, and that the prediction that the *siddhi*-yielding days of Tarapith would end with the destruction of that tree has been fulfilled.

The advocacy, or at least tolerance of such unconventional behaviour as one sees in Vāmākhepā and Śaṅkar Bābā, and in lesser measure in many

of the other sādhus of Tarapith who have lived among the bodies, bones and cremations of the Tarapith śmaśāna, relates directly to the nature of Tārā as a Tantric deity. Tantrism seeks to break the illusory bonds of māyā, not by turning away from its clutches in renunciation, but by devaluing its most constrictive aspects through participation (some would say indulgence) and thus bursting through the strictures to the freedom of the other unbounded side. The madness of Vāmākhepā is an extension of the conventional Tantric pañca-makara approach to sādhanā, by which nothing is fearful, sacred or taboo. Tārā rewards her devotees who, with minds fixed on her name or form, will revel in unlimited devotion to her unlimited being. Rāmaprasād refers to this in his song: "After passing through delusion after delusion...you have cut my bonds, you have lifted me to the tree's top." The Mother rewards with liberation, the goal of Tantric practices.

The designation of Tarapith as a siddhi-yielding pīṭha and of Tārā as a bestower of siddhis places Tarapith in a particular category of Śākta-pīṭhas. It is identified by its priests with two other siddha-pīṭhas where the other two eyes of Satī are supposed to have fallen: the pīṭha of Nīlasarasvatī of Mithila, where the left eye descended, and the pīṭha of Ekajaṭā Bhavānī on the west of the Karatoa River, where the right eye fell. The former is located at Janakpur on the Nepal side of the Indo-Nepali border, and the latter at Bhavanipur at Bagura in Bangladesh.[1]

Approaching Tārā as the siddhi-yielding Liberator is only one type of devotion practised at Tarapith. This side of the deity does not exhaust her character, and pilgrims do approach with other desires. The Kālikā

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[1]According to P. C. Bagchi (1939:42), the Tantras state that Ekajaṭā, Nīlasarasvatī and Ugratārā are different aspects of the same goddess.

Purāṇa lists Tārā among the 64 yoginīs (female divinities) whom one should worship for earthly rewards (artha and kāma) (Ch.66, lines 37-44). The goddess preserves her devotees in the face of their worldly sufferings, takes compassion on their pain, and lessens their burden.

Beane (1977:48-61) has identified four characteristics as typifying all the various aspects of Śakti: the aqualithic, therioaffinal, vegetal and sanguinary. We can easily find all of these applied to the Tārā of Tarapith: the Jiyata Kuṇḍa and Dwaraka River, the jackals, lions, snakes and goats with which she is associated, the tree associations in the cremation ground (the śimul tree of Vaśiṣṭha and the nīm tree under which Vāmākhepā meditated), and the continuing practice of goat sacrifice as a daily occurrence in the temple. Beane goes on to find in the goddess the three essential characteristics of the universal process: creation, preservation and destruction, as "three dimensions of one Sacred Reality" (1977:262). The mythology of Tārā portrays the same. She grants siddhis as part of her creative attribute. Her common form of address as Mother or 'Mā' is an expression of her creative trait. This was explained by Gyan Bābu. Tārā, he said, is the mother of the world. This means that she is the mother of both the elephant and the worms in its stool. Her creative role was also alluded to by one priest who responded to a pilgrim's question as to why a picture of Tārā represented her as naked by saying that she was naked because she was constantly giving birth. Tārā's ability to restore life and her bestowal of the boons of kāma and artha are preservative properties, and the dominant presence in Tarapith of the busy cremation ground portrays vividly her destructive propensity.

c. The Temple

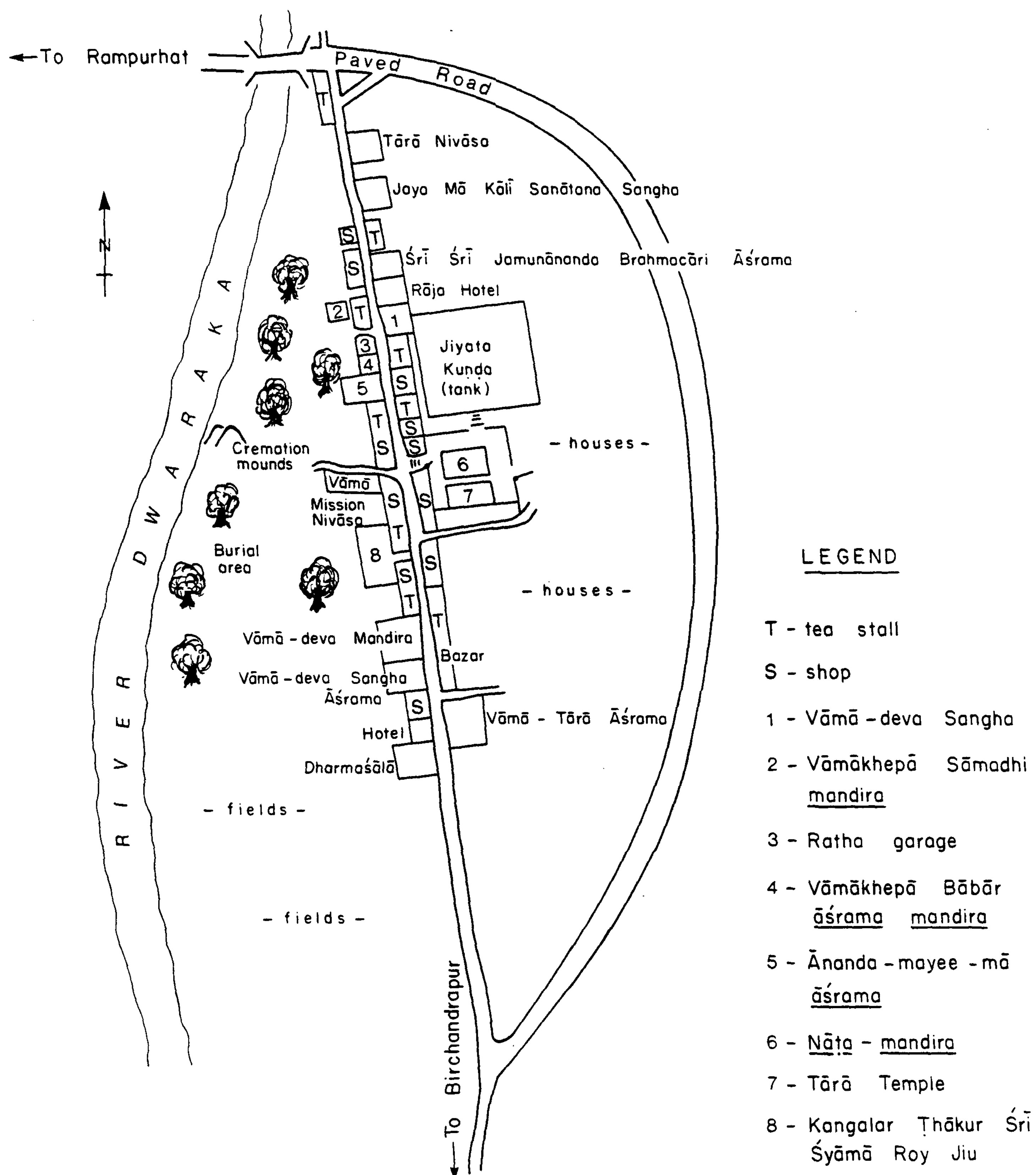
The temple to Tārā at Tarapith, as it now stands, was constructed in 1818 by Jagannātha Ray, a wealthy businessman of nearby Mollarpur, according to a plaque installed in the temple in 1951 by Ray's successors. This edifice was erected to replace an existing temple, which had been damaged by lightning. The temple had been endowed with land in the mid-eighteenth century by Rāṇī Bhavānī, the queen of Nator and her adopted son Rāmakṛṣṇa.[1] Since that time, many donors have provided land and funds for various constructions in the temple and its compound. Especially since 1935, according to inscriptions on the temple verandah and floor, the temple has received numerous donations. These include several small shrines, the naṭa-mandira before the temple, marble tiling for the temple floor, the provision of electricity, the installation of iron doors in the temple as well as repairs to existing structures. The increase in donations can be attributed to the upsurge of interest in Tarapith which occurred because of the fame of Vāmākhepā. However, the considerable amounts of land owned by the temple have been confiscated by the government and only two very small plots of land within the temple compound, which are used to grow flowers and vegetables for the pūjā, remain. The temple has no institutionalised means of support, securing needed resources from irregular donations. A small amount of money is generated by the sale of fish from the temple tank.

The temple is located within a compound built on a mound in the village. The flight of steps leading up to the compound gate is steep, and flanked

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[1] Rāṇī Bhavānī devoted herself to the creation and endowment of religious institutions, and is said to have established 380 of these in Benares alone. When her son Rāmakṛṣṇa took up asceticism, the zamīndāri collapsed and the princely income was dissipated; cf. Narendra Krishna Sinha, The History of Bengal (1757-1905), University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1967, p.422.

MAP 8 : TARAPITH



LEGEND

T - tea stall

S - shop

1 - Vāmā - deva Sangha

2 - Vāmākhepā Sāmadhi mandira

3 - Ratha garage

4 - Vāmākhepā Bābār āśrama mandira

5 - Ānanda - mayee - mā āśrama

6 - Nāṭa - mandira

7 - Tārā Temple

8 - Kangalar Ṭhākur Śrī Śyāmā Roy Jiu

by beggars and flower-vendors. The gate itself is a tall structure set into the wall surrounding the compound. It is known as the nahavat-khanna (place of shenai playing) because a temple musician plays a shenai (a reed instrument) every evening from the upper level of the gate. Inside the gate, beggars line both sides of the pathway that leads to the open-sided nāṭa-mandira. This pillared hall fills the centre of the temple courtyard, and it is around this central feature that all of the objects of pilgrims' attention are arrayed.

The temple itself stands on a three-feet high platform to the south of the nāṭa-mandira. It is approached by stairs leading to the top of the platform on either side of the temple's main entrance. Above these doors are three panels of beautifully detailed terracotta work, the fine temple art form of Bengal, depicting goddess Durgā (as Mahiṣamardinī) killing the buffalo-demon,[1] as well as scenes from the epic battles of Kurukṣetra and the Rāmāyaṇa. The shrine room of the image of Tārā is a very small, windowless chamber which will hold no more than ten people at a time.

The image which the pilgrim sees when he is led into the temple sanctum is about three feet tall, made of metal and heavily covered in clothing. The face and posture are representative of the Tārā known in the conventional iconography -- four-armed, tongue lolling, with a garland of skulls, etc.[2] But it is emphasised by the priests of the temple that this is not the true image of Tārā. Every evening, following the sandhyā ārati, pilgrims are allowed to have a darśana of the original image. The conventional metal statue is, in fact, hollow, and open at the back. The stone image of Tārā

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[1]Beane (1977:176-77) points out that this aspect of the goddess portrays her as preserver of the universe, a role with which Ugratārā is identified.

[2]As depicted in the first picture reproduced in this chapter.

has no discernible features. The events which are supposed to be depicted there are not easily made out. The pilgrims who wish to see this image queue up and are admitted into the sacred chamber in small groups. The priest responsible for pūjā that day unwraps the sāṛī which covers the stone image and points out to the pilgrims the significance of the various protrusions, depressions and other irregularities of the stone. Nīlakaṇṭha and Devī would not be evident there to the unguided eye.

The temple and religious complex at Tarapith are neither large nor extremely busy. Compared to other places of pilgrimage in India and even Bengal, it is a moderately busy regional tīrtha only. This is reflected in its institutional structure, which is relatively simple and uncomplicated.

There are four daily pūjās performed in the Tārā mandira as nitya (regular) pūjā. Morning begins with a bathing of the image. She is then decorated with her metal ornaments, musk, jewellery, sandal paste and flowers overtop a red sāṛī. This is followed by a mangala ārati (4 A.M.), during which sweet water, wet grams and a naivedya with sweets is offered. At noon there is a bhoga pūjā at which time cooked rice in the amount of ten seers (almost nine kilos), curried vegetables and sweetened rice is offered to the deity. The afternoon worship consists of pūjā with flowers and sweets, and the evening (sandhya) ārati (6-7 P.M.) is offered with a śitāla bhoga of fried breads, sweets and milk.

All of the daily pūjās are performed by the priest who holds the pālā (share) that day.[1] There are only 61 sevāits of the temple, and the rotation system for sēva is not subdivided into units for the full range of daily worship for his day. These same sevāits collectively own the temple.

[1]The worship of Tārā at Tarapith is done according to the Tantric mode, following the text Tārā-Bhakti-Sudhārṇava. This tantra has not been translated into English, although the published version of the Sanskrit text (Pañchanana Bhaṭṭāchārya (ed.), Sanskrit Book Depot, Calcutta, 1940) has an explanatory introduction in English. It is made clear in this introduction that the Tārā being worshipped in the text is the Hindu, not Buddhist, Tārā. Another work, by Brahmānānandagiri, published in the 16th century, entitled Tārārahasya, deals with the worship of Tārā in her various forms.

In 1942 a temple management committee had been constituted under the Sub-divisional Officer of Birbhum with the intention of regulating the temple and cremation ground. It was proposed that a fee of Rs.2 per body be charged for cremations, but the committee did not enforce its regulations and soon fell into decay.

On seven days in the month, there are special pūjās offerred in the temple. These are held on the śukla aṣṭami (eighth day of the light half of the lunar month), kṛṣṇa aṣṭami (eighth day of the dark half), caturdaśī (the fourteenth day of both fortnights), the new moon, the full moon and the last day of the month. These pūjās are inserted soon after the sandhyā ārati, at the time when the lunar day (tithi) is beginning, according to the astrological and astronomical calculations of the pañjīka (almanac). Each of these days sees an increase in the number of pilgrims, although this is marked only on the new moon (amāvasyā) day, which is particularly sacred to the fierce goddesses. Saturdays and Tuesdays are also days of special sanctity and increased pilgrim flow.

The annual festival calendar of the temple recognises five days with special pūjās: Ambarani (the twelfth day following the Dola Pūrṇīmā), Śivarātri (celebrated as the birth anniversary of Vāmākhepā), Kālī Pūjā, Durgā Pūjā and Koja Ghari Pūrṇīmā (the day before Lakṣmi Pūjā). This latter date is celebrated as the annual festival of teh temple and is called the mahotsava (great celebration). The crowd of devotees is largest on this day, and a melā (fair) takes place in the village. Falling on the caturdaśī day of the bright fortnight of Aśvina month, this day is celebrated as Tārā Pūjā day. It is said that it was on this day that Jaya Datta's son was restored to life, and the glory of Tarapith rediscovered.

The celebrations held for Tārā Pūjā show the historical connections

between Tarapith and the nearby royal and landed families who were formerly the patrons of the temple. An order is followed for the sacrifice of goats in the temple on this day. The first goat is sacrificed in the name of the Rāja of Bagdanga, the second the Rāja of Jemā, the third the zamīndars of Eroali, the fourth the Mallika family of Sahapur, the fifth the Mahārāja of Dinajpur, the sixth the Rāja of Nator and the seventh the zamīndar of Nīmtala. During the night, two special bhogas are offered to Tārā and her bhairava Candracūḍa.

Another local landowning family -- the Debansis of Saralpur village -- celebrate the Gajan festival at the temple of Candracūḍa in Tarapith, but nowadays in a much reduced fashion.

At the western edge of the nāṭa-mandira is the place set aside for goat sacrifices (balidāna), which are a popular form of offering to Tārā. The sacrificial pit is known as the hare-katta or yūpa-kaṣṭa.[1] It consists of a small, rectangular hole, filled with sand, and a two-pronged fork standing two feet high, with enough space between the prongs to accommodate the neck of a goat. Goats (chagala) which are brought for sacrifice are allowed to run freely in the temple courtyard while the pilgrim who wishes to offer the goat, almost always in fulfilment of a vow, is taken into the temple by his priest for the performance of a pūjā and purification. The goat is then taken to the temple tank (the Jiyata Kuṇḍa) and bathed. It is led to the hare-katta where it is lifted into the air by the priest and waved in the direction of the temple to indicate that it is an offering to the deity. Although the hare-katta is surrounded by pilgrims, the path between the spot of sacrifice and the deity is left clear. The goat's head is then fitted between the prongs of the fork and its legs are pulled

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[1]har: bone, katta: to cut; yūpa: sacrificial post, kāṣṭa: wooden.

back, extending its neck. One priest holds the legs and another clamps the mouth closed, preventing the goat from bleating from the pain of having its legs forced behind its back and also preventing it from moving its neck out of position. A pin is slipped into a hole in the forks behind the goat's head to further secure it. The temple drummer begins to beat his drum. A third priest, who has exclusive rights to perform sacrifices, then lifts the large, engraved silver sacrificial sword (khaḍga) above his head, muttering mantras,[1] and in one blow severs the goat's head. One priest is left with the twitching head in his hand and the other the kicking legs. Both parts are thrown off to the side to bleed, while pilgrims crowd in to dip a finger in the blood, which they touch to their foreheads and tongues, and to call out praises of Tārā. Some blood is collected in a small clay pot and, together with a banana, this is offered to Tārā in a small pūjā. After a short while (usually after the pilgrims who have commissioned the sacrifice have left the temple), the priest collects the pot and discards it into the temple tank.

The priest who performs sacrifices has inherited the right to do so in his father's line. He receives a Rs.2 fee for his services. The priest who serves the pilgrims pays this fee out of the pre-arranged amount paid by the jātris. Out of this amount also comes 50 paisa paid to the sweeper (a man of Namaśūdra caste), who appears soon after the sacrifice and, with water and broom, cleanses the floor of the nāṭa-mandira of blood.

Goat sacrifices take place twice or thrice on an average day in the temple, but on festival occasions, especially around the time of Tārā and Lakṣmi Pūjās, 150 to 200 goats will be beheaded daily.

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[1]Goat sacrifices are described in ritual detail in the Artharva Veda (iv.14) cf. Whitney 1962.

Pilgrims exhibit reverence for the hare-katta. In passing it, they will prostrate before it, touch some of the blood-impregnated sand to their lips, light incense or place a flower on the prongs of the fork. Some will leave a small coin on the prongs, which is pocketed by whoever sees it first -- beggar, child or priest.

Around the nāṭa-mandira within the temple compound are several other small shrines. The most important of these is to Śiva. It is said that in Tarapith there are two bhairavas to complement Tārā. One is Candracūḍa, the bhairava of the pīṭha, and the other is Akṣobhya (never-decaying), who is Nīlakaṇṭha at the breast of Devī. There is no temple to the latter Siva, but a small shrine containing a liṅga is dedicated to the former. It receives oblations from the daily sevāit of the Tārā temple as well as from pilgrims. Next to it is a temple to Nārāyaṇa, with a large statue of Viṣṇu's vāhana Garuḍa. The next is a shrine to Vāmākhepā containing a life-sized statue of the saint. There is also a small shrine to Vāsudeva (Viṣṇu) nearby. A second and lesser entrance gate to the temple is located in the eastern wall of the compound.

On the north side of the compound are steps leading down to the temple tank. The tank at Tarapith is considered as holy as the Ganges, and its water is believed to have magical powers. The myth of Jaya Datta and the revival of his son has given rise to a contemporary belief that a bath in the tank will ensure that a woman who has had still-born children will deliver live births.

On the marble floor of the temple compound and under the overhanging roof of the nāṭa-mandira sit the boys and young men who sell pilgrimage souvenirs. These are mainly reproductions of colourful and sometimes grimly imaginative representations of the fierce goddess, or likenesses of the temple image and Vāmākhepā. They also sell small pamphlets in

Bengali which tell the stories of Vaśiṣṭha, Vāmākhepā and Tarapith, as well as various trinkets. Most of the requisites for pūjā are obtained by pilgrims from the tiny shops which line both sides of the road approaching the temple, although some of the souvenir sellers also sell plates of sweets, bananas and vermilion powder.

d. The Śmaśāna

After the temple, it is the cremation ground of Tarapith which attracts pilgrims. This large grove of trees, reaching from the road to the river (approximately 100 yards by 600 yards) is a focus of fascination because of its strange and compelling activities.

The mahā-śmaśāna (great cremation ground)[1] of Tarapith is, firstly, a place for the disposal of bodies. Next to the river stand two large mounds of ashes and cinders which have been built up by years of cremations. The śmaśāna of Tarapith is famous, and bodies are carried there from long distances. There is a steady traffic of six to ten bodies daily, brought from as far away as Dumka, Dhanbad and Bolpur, each more than 50 miles distant.

The Tarapith śmaśāna is owned by three families of Ḍom caste, whose responsibilities have traditionally included the disposal of bodies. This work accounts for the very, very debased caste status to which Ḍoms are assigned. At Tarapith, the Ḍoms are permitted to enter the temple compound, but can proceed no closer than the nāṭa-mandira, since their presence would pollute both the deity and her sacred precinct. Each house of shareholders in the śmaśāna has two working male members, making a total of six shareholders, each of whom takes a day in a six-day rotation.

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[1]One sādhu said that the śmaśāna of Tarapith was a mahā-śmaśāna because it satisfied all of the requirements for that designation as set out in the Tantras: in a forest on a river bank with the water flowing from south to north, where dogs, jackals and vultures gather to eat human corpses. According to Monier-Williams (1964:801), the mahā-śmaśāna is discussed in the Kathāsaritsāgara.

When a body is brought to the *śmaśāna*, the Ḍom is responsible for initiating digging for burial or for igniting the fire. Although the Hindu tradition is very clear in advocating cremation over burial, my observation in Tarapith, which was confirmed by the Ḍoms, was that about 60% of the bodies are buried and not cremated.[1] The main reason for choosing burial over cremation is the prohibitive cost of the latter, which cannot be arranged for less than Rs.50. In either case, a fee is paid to the Ḍom for initiating the process. The fee is negotiable, usually falling between one and five rupees. Most of the work of burial or cremation is done by the family and friends of the deceased, who have carried the body on a palanquin from their home. It is they who dig the grave or build the pyre, and who bury the body or tend the fire.

The popularity of burial in Tarapith has several ramifications. Although the area of the cremation ground is large by the standards of cremation grounds, most *śmaśānas* do not permit burials and so need less land. Within the area of the Tarapith *śmaśāna* set aside for burials, the grave-plots are used again and again. Any spot which is not a raised mound of earth may be dug up for a grave. Since grave mounds generally flatten after one monsoon season, the disturbed graves of last year are still filled with at least the bones of their disrupted residents. These bones are separated out from the dirt which is used to fill the grave of the newly buried body, and are left out on the surface of the cremation ground floor. Thus, a walk in the *śmaśāna* is characterised by picking through the dried bones and part skeletons of the many bodies previously buried there.

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[1]Compare this fact with what is generally held about the disposition of bodies by Hindus, e.g., "Inhumation or burial proper is almost absent in the present day Hindu funerals, except in the cases of great saintly personalities and very small children" (Pandey 1969:239).

Since a darśana of the cremation ground is almost obligatory for every pilgrim, a stroll among the bones is an accepted part of every pilgrimage to Tarapith.

A second effect of the disruption of graves is the digging up of many human skulls. Skulls are considered to be the most favoured of āsanas (seats) for Tantric sādhanā, and their availability in a place heightens the attraction to sādhakas. In Tarapith one finds about ten sādhus of various kinds residing in and around the cremation ground. Some of these collect the skulls and use them in their daily routines. Most have five neatly arranged skulls in their huts, each decorated with flowers and a tilaka (coloured marking between the eyebrows, or sockets in this case). One sādhu had built an entire wall of his hut out of skulls using mud as mortar, and another wandered about the village with a skull as a begging bowl.

The sādhus of Tarapith are an integral part of the śmaśāna. They have chosen to live there in emulation of the greatest Tantric - Śiva - who was fond of cremation grounds. Like Śiva, they smear themselves with the ashes of human bodies, smoke hashish and drink wine. The śmaśāna is a favoured residence of Tantric sādhakas because it is here only that they can practise the necessary rites of śavāsana, the seat on a dead body. One religious preceptor who visited Tarapith during my stay actually did perform a midnight vigil seated on a human corpse on the new moon night.[1] For this rite, the body must be of a person of Śūdra or Untouchable caste, and have been killed accidentally, by lightning, snake-bite or similar, preferably

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[1]"The advanced tantrikas practise a type of āsana known as Savasana at cremation grounds. Such a place stresses the truth of transience and the aspirant's heart itself becomes a cremation ground - pride and selfishness, status and role, name and fame are all burnt to ashes. Meditation on certain types of corpses at midnight are {sic} considered best for overcoming fears and temptations, that confront the adept." (Mookerjee and Khanna 1977:190); see also Singh (1976:176).

on a Tuesday or Saturday (days sacred to Devī). The meaning of śavasāna is generally stretched by the sādhus to include residing over bodies, i.e., on land under which bodies have been buried.

Most of the sādhus revealed only a cursory knowledge of the texts and regulations of Hinduism. They do little but smoke, drink, beg and snarl at on-lookers who are not prompt enough in contributing to their support. Although ostensibly engaged in sādhanā, seeking the āsana of Vaśiṣṭha in their pursuit of siddhis, the priests of the temple and more respectable seekers encountered elsewhere in Bengal spoke very disparagingly of the sādhus to be found presently at Tarapith. It was said that, since Tantrism is an esoteric doctrine of secret practices, no true sādhaka would locate himself in as popular and populated a place as Tarapith, where, one sādhu in the Bakreswar śmaśāna sneered, the cremation ground is lit by electric lights. It is pointed out that even the jackals which inhabited the cremation ground during the time of Vāmākhepā, and which are important residents of a true Tantric śmaśāna, have deserted Tarapith in recent years.

The śmaśāna is dotted with the samādhis (memorial shrines) of sādhus who have died and been buried there.[1] Foremost among these is that of Vāmākhepā, which is the largest and most noticeable (because of its bright yellow colour, with a lion on the side). Daily bhoga is offered at this samādhi by one family of priests of the Tārā temple who were selected for the work and given a small piece of land to finance the expenses by the man who arranged for the construction of the samādhi in 1941.

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[1] Sādhus and sannyāsis are always buried, never cremated. One sādhu in Tarapith explained this practice by pointing out that initiation as a sannyāsi involves a ritual death, so the later bodily death should not be recognised.

Several activities are practised by pilgrims in the śmaśāna. The cremation ground is believed to be a sanctified place, and so, as in a temple, shoes must be removed before entering. The majority of pilgrims simply pick their way along one of the paths, thus having a darśana of the place and its sādhus, and then depart, their interest satisfied by a walk on the sanctified ground. It is said that the power of the śmaśāna is such that the very dust of the ground has curative properties. The maid-servant of Vāmākhepā was a leper who is reputed to have been cured of her leprosy by rubbing the mud of the śmaśāna on her body. One pilgrim interviewed at Tarapith had come on pilgrimage specifically to collect the mud of the śmaśāna for use in curing an ailment.

A few pilgrims, especially young men, sit with the sādhus for a smoke of hashish or a drink of wine. There is no doubt that these substances are consumed by the young pilgrims for reasons which are not fully in keeping with the dictates of Tantric ritual.[1] A few pilgrims perform religious rituals in the śmaśāna, such as offering a pūjā, coin or flower to the samādhi of Vāmākhepā, or to the small shrine next to his which is said to house two footprints left when Tārā gave darśana to Vāmākhepā. There is also provision for the offering of goat sacrifices at these shrines, but none was observed. Pūjā to the cremation ground itself, personified as Śmaśāni-mā, can be offered by the priests of the Tārā temple if pilgrims so request. Several pilgrims directed serious inquiries regarding religious matters to the śmaśāna sādhus. More commonly, pilgrims sought predictions of the future and blessings from the sādhus.

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[1]Drunkenness, and resultant rowdiness, is a problem at Tarapith. Drunken and abusive men are encountered almost daily among the pilgrims. During my stay, the priests of the temple pressed a court case against a local magistrate who had offended and threatened them while drunk in the temple. A priest was heard to chastise some young boys who had become drunk by alluding to the Tantras with the remonstrance: "He whose mind is steady drinks wine and promptly attains siddhis, but he whose mind is restless gets only misery."

The disappearance of the jackals from the Tarapith śmaśāna has put an end to an unique form of divination which was practised there. Pilgrims with a vow to Tārā could discover whether their wish would be fulfilled by offering a bhoga to the jackals of the cremation ground. Fine food would be spread on banana leaves on the ground of the śmaśāna and it was hoped that the jackals would come and eat it. They would be enticed with mantras and, if they did come, it was taken to indicate that the wish would be granted. If they did not, the wish surely would not be fulfilled. This bhoga offering was known as śivā bhoga (śivā = jackal). The jackals were believed to represent Śiva, who would send them to eat if he was well disposed to the pilgrim, and so inclined to intercede with Tārā on his behalf.

Another pilgrim activity in the śmaśāna which is still to be found is the practice of performing Nārāyaṇa-sevā, literally work on behalf of Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu). In Tarapith, this term refers to only one thing -- the mass feeding of the poor as a charitable act. The śmaśāna has open areas in which pits are dug for cooking. Rice, lentils and a vegetable preparation are cooked in large quantities by men, members of a sponsoring social club or association, who then serve it to the poor and destitute who have crowded in from neighbouring villages to be fed. Over 1000 people might be fed at one time. The juxtaposition of this impoverished feast within a few feet of where cremations and burials are taking place seems to disturb no one.

e. Purohits, Āśramas, Dharmaśālās

Within the last fifty years, the popularity of Tarapith has increased enormously. Older priests estimate that the volume of pilgrims is now 20 times the number encountered in 1925, and attribute the increase to the

fame of Vāmākhepā.[1] The number of priests serving in the temple has also increased but not as quickly as the numbers of their clients. Gurupada Paṇḍā[2] remembers there being twenty-six families of sevāits when he began service in the temple in the 1920's. A law suit regarding the division of temple sevā is supposed to have been heard by the Muslim governor of Birbhum in 1820 and at that time there were eighteen families of sevāits. Now this number has grown to thirty-two by the fission of old households and the addition of households founded by men who became priests after marrying daughters of priests. There are 61 active purohits among these households. These men collectively own the temple, and it is they alone who have the right to perform nitya and jātri pūjās.

Work in the temple follows a rotation system similar to that employed in the Gaurāṅga Mandira in Navadvip, in that the performance of daily pūjās is accorded to individuals by inherited right. In Tarapith the month is divided into 3 units of ten days, and each person's share of the sevā is actually a share of the ten day monthly unit. The original division into three equal parts took place when the sevā work of the temple was divided among the three sons of the original sevāit. Subsequent divisions resulted in two families in the group serving the first to the tenth of the month, four families in the second group and three in the third. Many priests bear the surname Chaṭṭopādhyāya, the name of the original (mūla) sevāit. Men who have joined the priesthood by marriage have introduced the names

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[1] Vāmākhepā has been the subject of a Bengali film, and just after I left West Bengal, a film entitled 'Joy Ma Tara' was released in cinema halls throughout the state. These popular media presentations have a noticeable impact on pilgrimage, as was also found at Tarakeswar.

[2] Paṇḍā is a term used to refer to guides and priests in pilgrimage centres. Gurupada's actual surname is Chaṭṭopādhyayā but, like all the priests at Tarapith, he uses the name Paṇḍā as a surname.

Mukhopādhyāya, Vandopādhyāya, Raya and Chākravartī among the priests, but some of these have been Chaṭṭopādhyāya's too, and so genealogy beyond four generations is confused. A kursi-nāma (genealogy) has been maintained from 1801, when an endowment of land to the temple priests necessitated better record-keeping. Most of the surnames on this list are replaced by the title Paṇḍā, however, and so it is not very useful for the sorting out of the actual descent lines. The original and all later priests have been Brāhmaṇs of the Rāḍhī subcaste.

The division of days by the priests is very specific. Each knows how many days in the month and year belong to his family. These may be reckoned as, for example, two days every alternate month, or simply by totalling the days in the year. It is also known to which specific days one has rights, as some days are obviously more lucrative than others. To give an example, the household of Gopāla Chaṭṭopādhyāya, of the second group, has rights to nine days in the year. The specific days -- two in Aśvina month, one in Śrāvana, one in Āṣāḍha, two in Māgha, one in Phālguna, one in Caitra and one in Jyaiṣṭha -- are all known and recorded. This share can be contrasted with the smallest, which is four days annually, and the largest which is thirty-nine days per year.

The succession problems resulting from the continually smaller division of temple services can produce interesting complications. When Indra Chaṭṭopādhyāya died, he left three daughters but no sons. His wife claimed the inheritance of his share of the temple and has divided the work among her grandsons (but not sons-in-law). The three sons of one daughter share one half, the one son of another daughter takes the second half, and Aruṇa, the son of the third daughter, who is also a priest, received nothing of Indra's inheritance because his father, Rāmapada Chaṭṭopādhyāya, is a priest as well and he shares in his father's allotment. When

Rāmapada's brother Śyāmāprasāda died, leaving no children, Śyāmāprasāda's share of 23 days reverted to his brother Rāmapada, who now shares these with Aruṇa as well.

The holding of rights to temple sevā rests in the joint household. The brothers share the work of the family days so long as the household remains one unit. When it splits, as it usually does soon after the death of the father who heads the house, there is intense quarelling as the elder brother seeks to maximise his share of the inheritance and the younger brothers seek to preserve theirs.

The sevāit of the day is responsible for the provision of all services to the deity in all four daily pūjās. The sevāit must also provide enough bhoga at the bhoga pūjā to feed all of the sādhus of the village with prasāda. A second portion of the bhoga is set aside to be distributed to pilgrims at a fee of Rs.2. This prasāda is served as a meal to those who want the blessing of eating sanctified food and is usually a source of profit to the sevāit rather than expenditure.[1] And a third part of the bhoga of much finer quality is set aside for those whom the sevāit of the day has invited to be his guests in the meritorious sharing of prasāda. Thus, in the half hour following the offering of the bhoga to Tārā, in three separate rooms behind the main temple, three separate groups of people participate in the consumption of sacralised food.

The sharing of temple work on a time-basis inhibits the development of priest-client relationships in Tarapith. Any pilgrim who arrives at the temple will have his pūjā performed by the duty sevāit. Only if a pilgrim seeks out his traditional priest, or recognises him loitering in the temple area, will he not use the available right-holder. Since the priests are interchangeable from the standpoint of function, few pilgrims

[1]Before this meal, Gyan Bābu solemnly recites Song 2, above.

seek out a priest who has previously served them, and so few purohit-jajmān ties are maintained. The priests at Tarapith generally do not maintain pilgrim registers, and none was found to have communicated with his clients between visits.

Pilgrims will, on occasion, offer a bhoga at the temple, usually in fulfilment of a vow. If the pilgrim comes to the temple and contacts the priest on duty for this offering, the pilgrim will be made to bear the expenses of the regular bhoga. If, however, the pilgrim chooses an off-duty priest to serve him in offering bhoga, this priest will prepare all of the food for the offering outside the temple, at the pilgrim's expense, and will bring it into the temple to be offered as an additional bhoga.

Fees paid to the priests by pilgrims are fully negotiable. The average pilgrim, for his brief pūjā to Tara will give dakṣiṇā (money offering) to the priest of between one and one and a half rupees.

The opportinities for employment outside the priesthood are extremely limited by the size of Tarapith. Agriculture, minor commerce and temple work are all that goes on in the village. In fact, however, some priestly families have been divided by sons seeking work outside the village. Sumbhir Kinkar Chaṭṭopādhyāya is employed in the railways, lives in Calcutta and visits Tarapith only on the days of his sevā. Amya, the son of Gurupada, does the same. Gurupada himself, as well as being one of the more senior priests, practises folk medicine at his home. The headmaster of the local high school located just outside Tarapith is a sevāit of the temple.

The priests of Tarapith are very much men of the rural area. Few have had much formal education. The practice of the priesthood is learned at the knee of one's father, not through any formal training. The houses of the priests are indistinguishable from those of other villagers, still being made of mud and being unserved by electricity. While it was not

possible to elicit an accurate account of the incomes of priests, observation would suggest a total of not more than Rs.200 per average month.

The āśramas of Tarapith can be divided into three categories. The first is institutions which are devoted to the propagation of the name and teachings of Vāmākhepā, the second those which are local branches of larger associations with headquarters elsewhere, and the third is small centres built and maintained by the disciples of local, minor spiritual preceptors.

There are three organisations working in the name of Vāmākhepā in Tarapith. The Vāmā-deva Sangha Āśrama, the Vāmā Niketan and the Vāmā Mission were all founded by disciples and followers of Vāmākhepā, and all share the same basic goals: to advance the name of Vāmākhepā as a great saint and preceptor, and to develop facilities in Tarapith in memory of Vāmākhepā which will add glory to his place of sādhanā. As such, all three organisations are primarily concerned with institutional activities, and do not concern themselves much with pilgrims. The Vāmā-deva Sangha, the most active of the three bodies, built a temple to Vāmākhepā (the Vāmā-deva Mandira) in 1956. The secretary of this association is a very active man, who oversees the operation of this temple, as well as supervising the bhoga and the distribution of prasāda in the Tārā temple. It was this organisation which had constructed a memorial to Jaya Datta in 1972, and which now operates a charitable dispensary in Tarapith. One pilgrim group included in the survey of pilgrims to Tarapith had been assembled and guided by the Vāmā-deva Sangha. The Vāmā Mission, which was endowed by the Mahārāja of the princely state of Darbhanga in north Bihar, and the Vāmā Niketan, are not as active as the Vāmā-Deva Sangha. The Vāmā Mission's principal activity is the operation of the Vāmā Mission Nivāsa

as a residence for members visiting Tarapith. This long, low building of small rooms is located across the road from the temple, on the path leading down to the river and śmaśāna. It was closed during the full duration of my stay in Tarapith. The Vāmā Niketan, which operates the Vāmā Tārā Āśrama, was operating in 1977-78, but only to provide accommodation to visiting members in its small facilities.

These āśramas, along with many private donors, have contributed funds for the erection of a second temple to Vāmākhepā in Tarapith - the Vāmākhepā Bābār Āśrama Mandira.

The Bengali female saint Ānandamayee-mā, and the male saint Nigamānanda Sarasvatī, both have small āśramas in Tarapith. The latter seemed totally moribund while I was in Tarapith, while the operation of the former consisted of activities of the one brahmacārin (initiate) of the organisation who was posted to Tarapith. Ānandamayee-mā first visited Tarapith in 1930, and her āśrama was built around 1937. The āśrama includes an installed Śiva-liṅga which is worshipped daily by the brahmacārin. In 1974 a charitable dispensary was opened, but it closed within two years for lack of funds.

The organisations discussed above are associations with the avowed goal of propagation of religion as preached by their particular preceptor. All suffer from shortage of funds and lack of committed leadership, and so devote a great deal of what organisational facilities are available to the sustenance of the organisations themselves. Little is left for service to pilgrims. The functions of these institutions in the place of pilgrimage are generally three-fold: providing objects of pilgrim devotion or participation, such as the two temples to Vāmākhepā, the memorial to Jaya Datta, the Śiva-liṅga of the Ānandamayee-mā āśrama and the distribution of the daily prasāda in the temple; the providing of

accommodation for pilgrim-members; and the circulation of the names of Vāmākhepā and Tarapith beyond the locality, thereby increasing the flow of pilgrims to Tarapith.

The residence of a sādhu is, by definition, an āśrama, and so the small bamboo huts found in the cremation ground and along the river from Tarapith are all āśramas. A few of these, however, have been endowed with small amounts of money by disciples of the master who is inhabiting or did inhabit the residence, and so the preceptor is honoured with as large a construction as affordable. In Tarapith, four such āśramas have been built: to Swami Suddhānanda, Ranga-mā, and Yamunānanda Brahmacāri and by the Santāna Sangha. The first three are solely of interest to disciples of the founder (or of his disciples) while the last has gathered sufficient funds for the construction of a small temple to Kālī in Tarapith. These institutions are of no great interest to pilgrims, except as they are present as features of the religious landscape of the place of pilgrimage, and so contribute to its character as a religious centre. They are an outgrowth of the specialised religious nature of the village, and in turn contribute to the religious ambience of the place of pilgrimage.

The Kālī temple of the Santāna Sangha is the second of two preferred places of residence for pilgrims who spend the night in Tarapith. Few do, as facilities are primitive, with no electricity in the rest houses, nor running water or indoor toilets. Those who do stay overnight prefer to stay at the Ramkanai Jamini Ranjan Pal dharmaśālā, which was built by a wealthy Calcutta family for the service of pilgrims. Although astringently ascetic in comforts, it is clean and solidly built. Pilgrims of lesser means will stay at the Kālī temple, which accepts donations for the right to spread a blanket, while the dharmaśālā charges Rs.2 per private room. The āśramas provide accommodation for their own members. In 1978, a

second charitable dharmaśālā, the Tārā Nivāsa, was under construction. There are three commercial eating establishments in the village, each worse than the next. A majority of the pilgrims who spend more than a morning in Tarapith (the usual time of visiting) take their afternoon meal from the prasāda of the temple.

f. Pilgrims

The village of Tarapith is sought out by pilgrims from throughout Bengal and beyond. Small groups wander through the cremation ground and the temple paying their respects and performing the rituals they have come to do. On most days, one or more busloads of pilgrims will have set upon the village. These groups establish a camp along the river bank, where they have a picnic and from where popular film songs played on portable radios and tape recorders are sent across the village and śmaśāna.

Bengali pilgrims predominate at Tarapith (Appendix B). Nine pilgrims stated Hindi as their mother-tongue while 429 (of 438 pilgrims interviewed) stated Bengali. A total of 25 pilgrims of the sample were resident outside of West Bengal, but, as the language figures indicate, the majority of these were Bengalis settled in other states. The number of pilgrims visiting Tarapith, from as far away as Assam and Gujerat, speaks to its importance as a Śākta-pīṭha and a place of pilgrimage.

Pilgrims from caste groups of higher status ranking were in the majority. Brāhmaṇs constituted 36.1% of the sample, and Kāyasthas 25.1%. The four higher status castes accounted for 281, or 64.2% of the pilgrims interviewed, while middle ranking castes contributed 86 pilgrims (19.6%) and lower status castes only 63 (14.4%). One Muslim and four Vaiṣṇavas were also interviewed.

The pilgrim sample revealed a strong Śākta orientation in cult affiliation. Śāktas accounted for 208 (47.5%) of the interviewees, while 76 (17.4%)

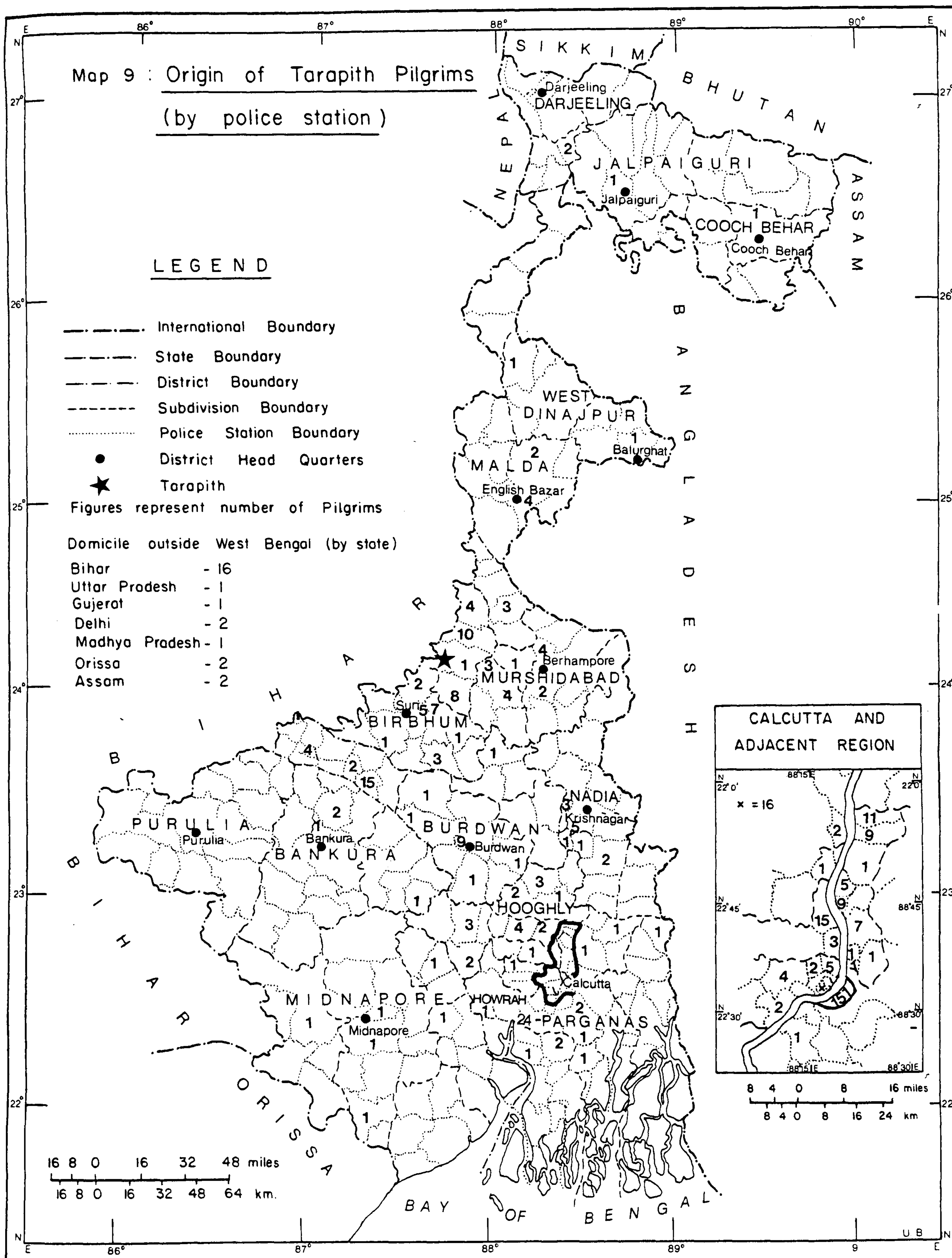
claimed to be Vaiṣṇavas and only 22 (5%) Śaivas. The number of Vaiṣṇavas visiting a place of Śākta worship where blood sacrifice is practised is surprising. Three pilgrims identified themselves as Tantrics, while nine claimed initiation into various Hindu orders, and 120 (27.4%) claimed no cult orientation.

Of the total sample, 76 pilgrims (17.4%) claimed no education. Fifteen (3.4%) had completed Class III, 64 (14.6%) Class IV, and 72 (16.4%) Class X. Matriculation had been achieved by 89 pilgrims (20.3%), while 66 (15%) held bachelor's degrees and another 25 (5.7%) still higher university diplomas.

Despite the distance form Tarapith to Calcutta, 151 interviewees (34.5%) were residents of Calcutta. Another 101 (23.1%) were residents of smaller municipalities within the state, and 16 had come from urban centres outside West Bengal. In total, then, 268 pilgrims (61.2%) were urban dwellers.

The urban bias of the pilgrim sample is reflected in employment characteristics. The government employed 140 of the breadwinners of the pilgrims' families in various official, clerking, technical and mechanical capacities. Another 25 (5.7%) were teachers, while 2 were lecturers and three each doctors and lawyers. Seventy-eight (17.8%) were employed in private sector enterprises. Business supported 115 (26.3%) of the families of pilgrims interviewed. Only 23 pilgrims (5.3%) owned and derived sustenance from their own agricultural land, and still fewer (9; 2.1%) were employed as agricultural labourers.

The majority of pilgrims to Tarapith had come simply to see the place and its renowned temple and cremation ground, have a <u>darśana</u> of these, with a <u>pūjā</u>, and to pray to Tārā for the general welfare of self and


Map 9 : Origin of Tarapith Pilgrims
(by police station)
LEGEND
International Boundary
State Boundary
District Boundary
Subdivision Boundary
Police Station Boundary
District Head Quarters
Tarapith
Figures represent number of Pilgrims
Domicile outside West Bengal (by state)
Bihar - 16
Uttar Pradesh - 1
Gujerat - 1
Delhi - 2
Madhya Pradesh - 1
Orissa - 2
Assam - 2
SIKKIM
BHUTAN
NEPAL
ASSAM
BANGLADESH
BIHAR
ORISSA
BAY OF BENGAL
DARJEELING
Darjeeling
JALPAIGURI
Jalpaiguri
COOCH BEHAR
Cooch Behar
WEST DINAJPUR
Balurghat
MALDA
English Bazar
MURSHIDABAD
Berhampore
BIRBHUM
Suri
NADIA
Krishnagar
BURDWAN
Burdwan
PURULIA
Purulia
BANKURA
Bankura
HOOGHLY
MIDNAPORE
Midnapore
HOWRAH
Calcutta
24-PARGANAS
CALCUTTA AND ADJACENT REGION
x = 16
16 8 0 16 32 48 miles
16 8 0 16 32 48 64 km.
8 4 0 8 16 miles
8 4 0 8 16 24 km

family. For many, especially those visiting the pīṭha on organised tours which were calling as well on several other places of touristic interest in the region, their journey to Tarapith was not undertaken to attain any specific gift or boon from the goddess.

Those making vows in Tarapith (33; 7.5%) had a wide number of goals in mind. Health (including safe delivery of children, the health of self or relatives, mental health and the physical welfare of children) and financial concerns (business prosperity, procuring a job and financial success) were the most commonly stated reasons for undertaking a vow. Other purposes -- success in examinations, procuring a good marriage arrangement, obtaining a child or specifically a son, resolving a dispute -- were also mentioned. Except in two cases, these vows were to be fulfilled by a subsequent visit to Tarapith, when a pūjā would be offered. In one of the exceptional cases a pilgrim making a vow for the safe delivery of a child vowed to return to Tarapith with the child to perform the annaprāśana ceremony. Another vowed to perform a pūjā with the sacrifice of a goat.

A slightly larger group had come fulfilling vows (45; 10.3%). Health and prosperity were again the most frequently stated goals for vows, but pilgrims also had other reasons: for a successful surgical operation, buying a car, the return of a lost son, passing school examinations and getting a child or son. Most of these pilgrims were fulfilling their vows with a pūjā, although those relating to children were frequently giving annaprāśana and/or the shaving of heads. Others were offering pūjā with a goat, a sāṛī or a bhoga.

Of the majority who had no vow at Tarapith, temple and mūrti (deity image) darśana was the most commonly stated purpose for the pilgrimage. A total of sixty-nine pilgrims, some with and some without vows, hoped

to come away from their pilgrimage having obtained better welfare for their families. Another 34 sought an improved mental state. A large variety of other purposes were stated by one or two pilgrims: to visit the āśrama of the guru, to remind Tārā of an unfulfilled vow, because of a dream of Vāmākhepā or Tārā, to mark the death anniversary of the guru, to accompany the guru in the offering of a sacrifice (homa), to bathe in the river (which one pilgrim called Gaṅgā), to perform life-cycle rites (annaprāśana, upanayana). Fourteen pilgrims gave devotion to Tārā as their reason for undertaking pilgrimage and another 21 sought śmaśāna darśana. Purification from sins and the accumulation of merit (puṇya) were each stated as motives by four pilgrims. A total of 33 pilgrims had come to Tarapith solely for tour purposes. Seven were performing Nārāyaṇa-sevā.

The reputation of Tarapith as a siddha-pīṭha drew 22 pilgrims for the performance of practices related to their own spiritual advancement. Most of these were planning either to meditate in the cremation ground or to perform japa, which is the repetition of the bīja (seed) mantra according to rules laid down in the Hindu sastras.[1] The bīja is the mantra which a Tantric sādhaka receives at the time of initiation, the recitation of which is an important part of his sādhanā. It may be recalled that it is said in the story of origin of Tarapith that the repetition of the bīja-mantra of Tārā will lead to the acquisition of siddhis by sādhakas.[2] Other sādhanā practices to be performed were nāma-gaṇa (the singing of the names of Śakti), homa (fire sacrifice) and the offering of śyāmā-saṅgīta. Another two pilgrims had come to Tarapith to acquire Tantric powers, one

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[1]Regarding Śākta bīja-mantras, see Woodroffe (1969:285-94).

[2]The Tārā mantra is said to be so powerful that it was the practice of this mantra which allowed Vaśiṣṭha to fix his home in the stars and Viṣṇu as Buddha to gain immortality. The mantra is five syllables: OM HRING STRING HUNG PHAT (A. K. Maitra op cit:12).

in order to combat evil forces which a powerful Tantric was using to harm him. Nine pilgrims were seeking the company of sādhus, and one was endeavouring to visit all of the fifty-one pīṭhas, of which Tarapith is one.

Twenty-two pilgrims gave the performance of sādhanā-related practices as their purpose for making pilgrimage. The number of pilgrims performing personal spiritual practices, including these twenty-two plus those who had come to Tarapith with another main purpose was fifty-one (44 for japa; 7 for dhyāna (meditation)). The combination of personal spiritual practices with other goals of pilgrimage reflects the multi-leveled nature of the religious complex at Tarapith. It is at once a siddha-pīṭha, a Śākta pīṭha, a temple to the goddess and a Hindu temple. Each of these aspects draws its own participants, sometimes to one, sometimes to several.

The other ritual performances performed by or on behalf of pilgrims to Tarapith were of many types. Pūjā was the most common ritual activity of pilgrims, being offered at the Tārā temple by temple priests on behalf of 356 (81.3%) of the sample.[1] Besides rituals which have been mentioned already, pilgrims also offered homa, tears (cakṣu-jala (colloquial chōker-jol); i.e., devotional thoughts and acts involving sufficient emotion to bring tears), the recitation of the Bhagavad Gītā and Caṇḍī-pāṭha, and wine to Tārā,[2] the donation of money to the temple, the performance of prostrating circumambulation (daṇḍi-katta), collecting the mud of the śmaśāna or the hare-katta (place of sacrifice) and the offering of pūjā to the samādhi of Vāmākhepā in the cremation Ground. Fifty pilgrims sought only the darśana

[1]The favoured items of pūjā were offerings of incense, fruit, sweets, seasonal vegetables and red flowers (especially the jabā, or China rose).

[2]"Wine...is Tārā herself in liquid form, Who is the Saviour of beings, the Mother of Enjoyment and Liberation" (Avalon 1913:273).

of the deity. Eight pilgrims were tourists only and were performing no rituals at all.

Visits to places in addition to Tarapith were the rule. The nearby pītha of Bakreswar, with its Śiva temples and hot springs, was being visited by 145 (33.1%) of the pilgrims to Tarapith. The university established by Rabindranath Tagore at Bolpur drew 69 pilgrims (15.8%) while the Massanjore dam project attracted 14. Birchandrapur, birthplace of Caitanya's close disciple Nityānanda, located very near to Tarapith, had been included on the itinerary of 13 pilgrims. Other Vaiṣṇava centres -- Gayā, Puri, Kenduli, Navadvip, Bishnupur -- accounted for another 12 responses. These pilgrims may have visited Tarapith as a secondary goal of their pilgrimage. This would explain some of the high number of Vaiṣṇava pilgrims found there. Śiva-Śakti religious centres -- Nalhati, Labhpur, Vaidyanātha-dhāma, Kāmākhya, Nandekeśwari, Gushkura, Bundubasini, Bhadreś-wara -- were also being visited by Tarapith pilgrims. Secular sites, such as the steel mills at Durgapur, the beach resort at Digha, the dam at Farakka and the hill station of Darjeeling were also included on tour outings stopping at Tarapith.

Most pilgrims (269; 61.4%) did not spend the night in Tarapith, despite the long distances from home most had travelled. This likely reflects the lack of good facilities to be found in the village. Eighty-five pilgrims spent at least one night away from home but not in Tarapith.

Family groups accounted for 55.9% of the pilgrim parties to Tarapith. Interviewees who were travelling alone numbered 26 (5.9%), and those with groups of friends 61 (13.9%). A very large minority of the sample (106; 24.2%) had come to Tarapith with organised parties of an average size of

42 members. Of these groups, five were school parties, three were groups organised by industrial staff associations, two were government office staff associations, one was a businessmen's association, one was a touring theatre group and four were parties organised by religious organisations. The rest of the groups were local neighbourhood parties, or several families which had jointly hired a bus. Members of these tour groups gave several reasons for preferring visits to Tarapith -- its suitability for inclusion on itineraries visiting several places in Birbhum and neighbouring districts, its interesting tourist attractions (especially the cremation ground), the availability of good picnic sites at Tarapith, etc. Tarapith's relative inaccessibility in rural Birbhum would also encourage group journeying and, in fact, the size of family groups was also relatively large, compared to Navadvip and Tarakeswar.

The sample was almost equally divided between pilgrims who had not visited Tarapith before (224, 51.1%) and those on second or subsequent return visits (214, 48.9%). Of those returning, 124 (57.9% of returnees) had been to Tarapith within the previous year. This figure reflects two facts about pilgrimage to Tarapith: that the number of pilgrims has been growing rapidly in recent years, hence the relatively large number of interviewees who were returning after a first visit in the not-distant past; and that there are individuals who return to Tarapith at regular intervals, such as at every new moon (i.e., monthly), or annually for festivals or in the month of Pauṣa.

Only 67 (31.3%) of the returning pilgrims used the same priest as they had on previous visits, representing the relative insignificance of jajmāni relationships between priests and pilgrims at Tarapith.

Pilgrimage to Tarapith is as varied a practice as there are varieties of characteristics in the place itself. Although a small rural village,

the features of the sacred area within the village are of many types. Tārā herself, the _śmaśāna_, the _sādhus_ of Tarapith, Vāmākhepā, the river, the Jiyata Kuṇḍa (temple tank), the proximity of other places of interest, the reputation of the place as a _siddha-pīṭha_, the local _āśramas_ (especially those dedicated to Vāmākhepā) and the inclusion of Tarapith among the _mahā-pīṭhas_ of Śakti are all factors, each distinct but still complementary to the others, which draw pilgrims to the pilgrimage of Tarapith.

CHAPTER VII

COMPARISON OF THE THREE CASE STUDIES

a. The Comparative Perspective

The preceding chapters have each dealt with the social field of a particular place of pilgrimage. As we have seen, a pilgrimage is very much more than its place. It is a dispersed field of social relations, involving various places, a variety of actors, a wide range of rituals, formal and informal relationships, orthodox and popular theology and a long history of development which reflects the social, political, religious and economic forces of the times and places where it has occurred. The term 'pilgrimage' refers to the full complex of human and material elements involved in the movement of people from home to shrine and back again. Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith are foci of pilgrimages, each of which is a composite of elements making up a highly individuated institution. This chapter seeks to identify certain categories that are fundamental to the structure of all three pilgrimages, and then to probe beneath the evident complexity and diversity that the ethnography reveals, in search of a level of analysis at which the three religious complexes can be seen to be participating in and drawing upon a shared paradigm of pilgrimage.

The pursuit of a paradigm is a comparative exercise, leading to generalisation. The three cases here under review are different from one

another, yet in some ways are similar as well. The analysis that follows must tread the narrow path between the steep mountain of over-generalisation and the deep chasm of under-analysis. Guidance on the dangers of the former is available in the studies undertaken by Lévi-Strauss and Goldenweiser on the uses of the term 'totemism,'[1] in which it was shown that no unitary group of characteristics was consistently identified with the term. The notion of totemism was thus identified as an over-generalised catch-all for a variety of social activities, each of which had its own identity within its own greater social and symbolic system. Might not the same be true of the term 'pilgrimage' which has, after all, been almost uncritically accepted to designate a category of activity which has some valid unity?

Under-analysis would find this study proposing typologies of pilgrimages. This approach is indeed a temptation when one reviews the Hindu examples of pilgrimage practice, which themselves suggest categories into which the various pilgrimages can be sorted, by presiding deity, cult associations, age or antiquity or rank in a hierarchy of shrines. The obvious weakness in this approach, which has nevertheless been adopted by many writers on the subject of pilgrimage (and which has been criticised more fully in Chapter I), is that a typology divides the full category without attempting to address the features that in turn unite the subcategories. It is, to use an analogy, like attempting to discuss the nature of an animal by stating that it has parts, which are then named. If a single term such as 'pilgrimage' is to be applied in a variety of instances, then there must be some accepted definition to which all cases conform. A further difficulty with analyses that cease with typologies is that the sorting of cases by key characteristics will vary according to what the

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[1]Claude Lévi-Strauss, Totemism, Beacon Press, Boston, 1963; A.A. Goldenweiser, "Form and Content in Totemism," American Anthropologist, xx, 1918, 280-95.

analyst chooses to use as the basic trait for sorting. This choice is a subjective decision which does not always lead to an objective ordering of data. A typology based on deities, for example, will not necessarily coincide with one based on a hierarchy of shrines, size of catchment, location, association with natural features, etc. While Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith all fall into different categories by deity, they can all be considered part of one category as regional (as opposed to local or pan-Indian) shrines. Then again, Navadvip is Vaiṣṇava, while both Tarakeswar and Tarapith can be considered as being of a single Śaiva-Śākta category of pilgrimages. A different analytical perspective seeks the common structural elements that justify calling all three institutions 'pilgrimages.' These elements exist on a deep level of sociological reality, compared to which the differences of deity, cult, catchment, etc., are only contextual and incidental features.

The case studies of Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith reveal differences among the three centres (Chart 1). The deity, and hence rituals, mythology and symbolism of each differs from the others. The foundation narratives do not overlap at all. The institutional structures that have developed in the places of pilgrimage share with each other certain characteristics common to _maṭhas_ or _āśramas_ everywhere in India, but are nevertheless distinct from each other in their particular organisation, operation and goals. When selecting the three places of pilgrimage for this study, I attempted to generate diversity in the sample by choosing centres sacred to the three main branch cults of Bengali Hinduism. The diversity that was found can be attributed largely to the association of each of the three centres with a different cult, and hence sub-tradition, of Hinduism, mingled with local vicissitudes of history. All three cases,

however, are comparable according to a number of categories. Each has its own location, belief complex, shrine centres (sacred areas), ritual specialists, ritual behaviour, clientele and pilgrimage journey. These categories form the elementary components of the pilgrimage complex and delineate the full socio-cultural field of each pilgrimage. They are therefore the basis for comparison of the three case studies.

Chart 1: Main features of the three case studies

Feature	Tarakeswar	Navadvip	Tarapith
Site	Hooghly District	Nadia District	Birbhum District
	on tank	on river	on tank and river
	small municipality	medium municipality	village
Deity	Tāraknātha	Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya	Tārā (Ugratārā)
Assimilated to	Śiva	Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu	Śakti
Cult	Śaiva	Vaiṣṇava	Śākta
Mūrti (vigraha)	liṅga	avatāra (anthropomorphic	devī (anthropomorphic)
Special character	svayambhuliṅga and jagrata	yuga-avatāra	Śākta-pīṭha of Satī, siddha-pīṭha and jagrata
Sacred foci	temple and tank	temples, shrines and river	temple, tank and cremation ground
Ritual specialists	hereditary Brāhmaṇ purohits plus those appointed by the mahanta	hereditary Vaiṣṇava Gosvāmin Brāhmaṇ priests	hereditary Brāhmaṇ priests
Religious institutions	maṭha under daśanami sannyāsi mahanta	maṭhas under Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sannyāsis; āśramas; ṭols ākhāḍās	āśramas

b. Sites

Geographically, the place of pilgrimage is the centre of a pilgrim catchment area. Since the distribution of castes, classes, population density and even religions in West Bengal is uneven, the pilgrimage shrine is not at the exact centre of an evenly-distributed pilgrim matrix. Neither Tarakeswar, Navadvip nor Tarapith is located within the immediate sphere of the main concentration of population from which pilgrims are drawn (i.e., greater Calcutta). All three places are central to their own field of participants, yet marginal to the most densely-populated localities of the state. They are within easy reach of Calcutta and the other major cities of West Bengal, yet are situated beyond the area of urban hinterland still fully within the pull of the city.

All three sites are associated with water: the Damodar River near Tarakeswar (which was important for the development of the town as a monastic centre), the sacred Ganges which crosses Navadvip, and the Dwaraka River, on which Tarapith is located. The first and last are also associated with sacred tanks. While Navadvip itself has no greatly important tank, within the sacred zone of Mahāprabhū-pāṛa there are replicas of the two holiest tanks in Vṛndāvana -- the Rādhā Kuṇḍa and Śyāmā Kuṇḍa.

None of the settings of these three places is exceptional. All of southern West Bengal is a flat area of unmarked plains. In none of the three cases do we find evidence for the theory that pilgrimage places tend to be located at places of outstanding natural features. These sites do, however, conform to the literal meaning of the term <u>tīrtha</u>, being closely associated with water. All three centres are marginally located with respect to concentrations of population in West Bengal, lending some credence to the theory that places of pilgrimage are conventionally located away from

centres of population so that they will retain their other-worldly religious divorce from the volatile forces of economic, political and social history centred in the cities. It is worth noting that several days of questioning at the Śākta pīṭha of Kalighat, located in the heart of Calcutta, revealed almost no pilgrims among the temple-goers. The vast majority of worshippers were Calcuttans for whom Kalighat is a local temple. The balance were people from outside Calcutta who had found themselves in the city for some other purpose besides visiting the temple, but who were having a temple darśana once they were already in Calcutta.

c. Foundation Narratives

Since neither geographic nor demographic criteria can account for the specific locations of Tarakeswar, Navadvip or Tarapith, it seems most acceptable to conclude that historical events which took place in those places resulted in their recognition as sacred. These events have been eulogised in foundation narratives and related folk mythology. It is difficult to ascertain exactly what part of these narratives represents historical record and what is the result of the transmutation of these generative events into the conventionally-accepted forms of one or the other of the cults of Bengali Hinduism. We find that each of the three places of pilgrimage is said to have had its origin in events which showed supernatural intervention: the miraculous shedding of milk on a hidden, bottomless stone; the descent of a divinity to live among men; and a vision of the deity and later miraculous revivification. In turn, the elements of these events (whether actual or mythic) have been channeled into the patterns of existing socio-cultural forms, so that the stone becomes a liṅga of Śiva, the inspired devotee an avatāra of Kṛṣṇa and

the deity an anthropomorphic form of that which already existed at that place (a part of Satī's body fallen from Śiva's shoulder). The channeling activity takes place because the mass of people recognise the significance of the events within familiar modes of thought and expression, perhaps even to the extent of greatly altering (or even completely transforming) the facts of what originally took place.

The foundation narratives of all three Bengali places of pilgrimage tell of the active presence of the deity in the place. It is told that Śiva as Tāraknātha of Tarakeswar, Kṛṣṇa as Caitanya of Navadvip and Sakti as Tārā of Tarapith were once and continue to be materially present in those places. A pilgrim who visits any of these places today sees the symbols of these deities. As all symbols, the focal signifying objects of the Bengali pilgrimage centres are associated with various sorts of meaning. The _liṅga_ in the temple of Tarakeswar is simultaneously a symbol of a phallus, Tāraknātha and Śiva, as well as of the qualities and characteristics associated with each of these. The stylised wooden men that represent Caitanya also evoke all _avatāras_, Kṛṣṇa and Viṣṇu. Similarly, the image of Tārā links with those of all the other aspects of Śakti (Kālī, Durgā, etc.) as well as the great Śakti herself. The images enclosed in small rooms within temples at the hearts of their respective sacred zones stand as multivalent symbols for various levels of signification. Many-layered symbolism is characteristic of all images which are exact replicas of these, however, i.e., any Śiva _liṅga_, image of Caitanya or Tārā _mūrti_. What sets the central images of the places of pilgrimage apart from other representations of the same character elsewhere is the fact that the deity is believed to have infused this particular place with the vital energy emanating from his or her own manifest presence in the place. Historically,

Śiva, Kṛṣṇa and Śakti were all actually present in Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith, according to the foundation narratives. The images that stand in these places today are established in legend as being superior to other images of the same type: the svayambhūliṅga of Tarakeswar, the wooden image of the Gaurāṅga Mandira that was carved at Caitanya's personal behest, and the image of Tārā and Nīlakaṇṭha housed within the outer image of fearful Ugratārā, which materialised when Satī's eye hit the earth, are all present-day deity-images of extraordinary character. The mūrtis or vigrahas that the pilgrim sees in the holiest of holies in the pilgrimage shrine represent the fons et origo of the sacredness of the place. These images are recognisable as typical of their kind yet are simultaneously distinguished in legend as exceptional.

Perhaps more importantly for contemporary pilgrimage practices, the deity is believed to be eternally present in these places. Both Tārak-nātha and Tārā are described as jagrata (awake) and are believed to be living deities. The līlā of Caitanya that occurred in Navadvip 500 years ago is said to be continually recurring in that same place today. These ideas are given ritualistic form in the practice of honouring all three deities as if they were present and living in their shrine, subject to the needs of sleep, hunger, warmth, distraction, etc. To so honour a deity is a standard form of Hindu worship, but when combined with a foundation narrative that purports to document the manifestation of the deity in just that place, the central shrine deities of the places of pilgrimage are infused with an especial vitality. The places of pilgrimage, in turn, derive a reputation for sanctity from this characteristic of manifest and on-going divine presence.

The foundation narratives recorded in West Bengal are revealing of

conceptions of the relationship between the world of man and the realm of the gods, and the types of interaction that can take place between the two. A place of pilgrimage is a location where one seeks to meet with the deity. Places become designated as suitable for this activity because events widely believed to reflect divine presence are supposed to have occurred there. These events are cast in the mould of the cult that has declared their occurrence. In all three cases, we find tales of the intersection of the common perceptible world and the realm of the deities, which Hindu cosmology generally depicts as real with quasi-material properties, but ordinarily closed to the view of mortal souls. Direct intercourse between man and deity -- in the form of a divine descent, a human ascent or an apparition -- marks the presence of the divine among men and on earth. Sites where this phenomenon has occurred are considered exceptional because the historical presence of the deity makes it here that one is most likely to be able to meet and communicate with the deity. Moreover, it is believed that a tangible divine force infuses the place where the deity has manifested himself.

The institutional structures that tend to develop following the foundation of the shrine and pilgrimage propagate stories which emphasise the enduring vitality of the shrine deity. While a certain event, canonised in mythological form (often with an overlay of scriptural elements such as the stories of Kṛṣṇa's childhood infiltrating events supposed to have been Caitanya's childhood, and the integration of Tarapith within the fold of Śākta pīṭhas linked to the Dakṣa-yajña myth) has instigated the pilgrimage, the source of that event -- the power and the presence of the deity -- remains lively and undiminished in the place today. So it is that Tarakeswar is believed to be the residence of Śiva,

Tārā repeatedly yields the gift of siddhis at her siddha-pīṭha Tarapith and Caitanya is eternally engaged in Kṛṣṇa-līlā in Navadvip. The processes and beliefs which the foundation narratives relate to supposedly historical events are aspects of the current belief structure associated with the place of pilgrimage. The narratives function as validating mythologies for present-day practices.

The foundation narratives cloak aspects of religious thought in the garb of historical events (real or fictional) and thereby express cosmological precepts in the form of actual occurrences. This fact points to another dimension of the intersection of the divine and human realms mentioned above. The place of pilgrimage is located at a fixed geographical point on earth, and in most cases became a place of pilgrimage within demarcated historical time. Yet, on the other side of the symbolic water of the place of pilgrimage, we find the timeless, ahistorical realm of the gods which is not fixed in space. The foundation narrative operates on two levels in accounting for the development of a certain place as a pilgrimage site from a certain point in time, but it does so in an idiom which contains within itself the central notions of timeless philosophy to which the preceptors of the deity's cult subscribe. In every case we find men recognising the presence of the deity, who has chosen to appear then and there, reaching into the human world and hence voluntarily taking the limited form that is to be found in the pilgrimage shrine. The form that the deity takes -- in our cases the stone liṅga, the human avatāra and the divine but anthropomorphic Mother -- associates each of these particular stories with the full range of myth, idea, symbol and precept associated with Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, Śakti and their respective cults. The particular foundation narratives flow into the full body of myth and symbol of Hinduism, invoking the meanings and concepts of

the wider religious system, thus merging the ideational features of each pilgrimage with its parent cultural whole.

The obvious fact that the deity worshipped in the pilgrimage centre is a local form of a more universal deity of Hinduism is also noteworthy. The local deity has his own character in which is crystallised the unique historical and religio-thematic features (such as myths, supernatural powers, proclivities, etc.) that are glorified as the greatness of this deity and pilgrimage. The differentiation of Tāraknātha, Caitanya and Tārā from the encompassing, universal Hindu deities of which they are aspects, allows for the development of a degree of specifically local religious culture in the place of pilgrimage. Such differentiation frees proponents of the particular pilgrimage to create a somewhat independent (and perhaps even syncretic) belief system as the structure of meaning around that shrine.

To summarise, the deity presented in the foundation narrative is a vehicle for the celebration of the divinely-infused nature of the particular place of pilgrimage. The legend also relates events said to have occurred at that place to the established fund of ideas of the cult and ultimately the religion as a whole. Through the stories of the deity and the events of the past, the foundation narrative brings the supernatural realm and the cosmological order down to earth and within the purview of the pilgrim. It is not necessary here to perform an exigesis of the symbolism of the _liṅga_, _avatāra_ or Mother to recognise the important role these concrete and earth-related symbols have in fixing the timeless concepts of the religious tradition to particular manifestations in time and space. The foundation narrative does this by providing a story-line of events which accounts for Śiva, Viṣṇu or Śakti having descended to take form and be present in Tarakeswar, Navadvip or Tarapith. These stories

provide an ideological bridge to link the limited world of man and the limitless realm of the supernatural which coexist in the place of pilgrimage. The same bridging function is performed by the focal material symbols of the places of pilgrimage, i.e., the images of the central shrines. These are at one and the same time objects localised in time and space among men, and manifestations of their respective deities. In this way the verbal imagery of the foundation narratives and the visual symbolism of the shrine images perform parallel functions in establishing linkages between the human and divine realms and hence the local, specific and individuated with the universal, general and cosmic.

d. Differentiation versus Conformity

It is evident that there are two opposing forces that work to determine the symbolic character of the place of pilgrimage. There is the need to create an unique character for the place of pilgrimage, in order to differentiate it from and glorify it over, other places of pilgrimage. Simultaneously, there is the necessity of fostering links and continuities between the pilgrimage and the wider society and religious tradition to which it belongs and from which it draws pilgrims. A dynamic balance must be established between the forces of syncretisation and individuation on the one hand and orthodoxy and conformity on the other. Were the place of pilgrimage to develop a character which was very much of a kind with other places of pilgrimage, it would have insufficient unique qualities to attract pilgrims. Alternatively, were it to become a highly ideosyncratic centre, its suitability for the purposes of pilgrimage, related as they are in Bengal to widespread cults and universal deities, would be diminished. The pilgrimage centre is both set apart and especially sanctified yet at the same time is reassuringly familiar to its patrons.

There are several methods by which this middle ground of shrine character is established. The claim of each place to only a limited aspect of the greater deity both associates and differentiates the local manifestation from the overarching great deities of the Hindu pantheon. Earlier chapters have documented the association of Tāraknātha, Caitanya, and Tārā with Śiva, Kṛṣṇa (and Viṣṇu) and Śakti, while noting as well the complexes of meaning and practice which make the local deities nevertheless distinct. Another factor which establishes the pilgrimage centre as both common and yet different is its intensification of that which is part of the more generalised belief patterns of the society. The symbols and images associated with a pilgrimage are invested with a special and distinguishing significance because they are more concentrated, intensified versions of those available elsewhere. Thus the <u>liṅga</u> of Tarakeswar is believed to be more intimately part of the essence of Śiva because it is a <u>svayambhūvaliṅga</u>. The fact that Caitanya took birth in Navadvip elevates that city, among all the holy centres of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, to equivalence with heavenly Vṛndāvana. Similarly, the inclusion of Tarapith among the most sacred of the Śākta temples as a Śākta <u>pīṭha</u> lifts that shrine above its fellow temples to the goddess. The place of pilgrimage stands as a magnified focus of that which is commonly accepted within the religious culture of the community of the pilgrims. It is a nexus for the symbolic expression and popular engagement of important aspects of the semantic system in the culture of which it is a centre. As such, rather than being syncretic or divorced from everyday beliefs and practices, its essential nature is to be a concentrated distillation of these, where the pilgrim sees, hears and imbibes in exceptionally undiluted clarity, the truths and experiences with which he has lifelong familiarity, but which are heightened and magnified in the place of pilgrimage.

Most concretely, the intensification of sacred symbols takes the form of a highly compact area or areas within the place of pilgrimage. Each of the three places of pilgrimage was found to be a multi-functional residential centre of varying size, within which is located a distinct zone, or zones, of religious activity. Each sacred zone was found to be an aggregate of specialised buildings and minor structures marked off from the profane sections of the town and arranged in such a way as to allow for the easy flow of crowds through sufficiently large thoroughfares. The physical arrangement of each zone centres on a main shrine, within which is housed an image of the shrine and pilgrimage deity. In all three cases, the sanctity of the sacred area is acknowledged by pilgrims removing their shoes at the gate before entering. Navadvip, perhaps in keeping with the populous pantheon of Vaiṣṇava deities, avatāras and saints, has more of a polycentred than unifocal sacred zone, although the ritual hierarchy of shrines clearly elevates that of Gaurāṅga to an unrivalled height.

e. Symbolism

A pilgrim entering the sacred zone enters an environment filled with a large number of objects and edifices of a limited range, in keeping with the type of sacred zone. The pilgrim sees temples and shrines, which will be outstanding for their conventional temple architecture. The outside walls of these are usually decorated with symbolic imagery depicting motifs relevant to the shrine deity and his associated mythology. The symbols are found repeatedly by the pilgrim in all corners of the sacred zone -- in the shops of the pilgrimage souvenir sellers, on the walls of houses, lodges and eating places, in the words of the temple priests and the pleading cries of the beggars (who invoke the local deity as they beg), in the pamphlets for sale in the temple area itself, in the songs sung by other pilgrims. The air

and the visual space of the sacred zone is filled with the presence of this deity and associated mythology, portrayed in rich symbolism through many media. The pilgrim takes in an intensely concentrated infusion of messages from this densely-packed field of overlapping symbols. Whatever information about the deity the pilgrim possessed before making his pilgrimage is here reinforced as his mind receives a vivid imprint of the history, glories, powers, etc., of the shrine deity. The sacred centre is therefore a perceptual field of a limited range of stimuli in which the pilgrim is freed from the distractions of ordinary social life to concentrate upon and interact with the symbolic environment that he has entered.

The deities of the focal shrines of Bengali pilgrimage centres are all aspects of great deities in the Hindu pantheon. Each of the cults for which the shrines are central claims for its deity a pre-eminent place among the other deities of the pantheon. The relative hierarchy supported by that cult is given expression in the arrangement of the major and minor shrines in the sacred zone. The central shrines of Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith have located very near to them small shrines dedicated to other deities of the Hindu pantheon. The temple area of Tarakeswar includes small shrines to Kālī (Śakti) and Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu). In Navadvip, the Śiva and Śakti shrines spread throughout the polycentred sacred zones are clearly fewer and less important than the Vaiṣṇava centres. The temples of the Bhairava (Śiva) of Tarapith and of Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva (Viṣṇu) located adjacent to Tārā's temple are overshadowed by the latter. In every case, the relative positioning of the shrines makes a statement about the ranking of deities as seen by each cult. The contextual structures are themselves messages, as Bateson says (1972:155).

The conscious deployment of symbols in pilgrimage centres functions in two ways to impress upon the pilgrim the nature and relative status of the

shrine. Repetition of symbolic motifs gives an emphatic character to the place of pilgrimage, while the relative positional ordering of symbols makes a statement that is cosmological (asserting a divine hierarchy) and sociological (in that the hierarchy of deities is a representation, in a Durkheimian manner, of the hierarchy that each cult sees as placing it above its rival cults). Both aspects of the symbolic field of the pilgrimage centre depict the shrine deity, in character and ascendancy, but also indicate that each deity is part of a larger pantheon of deities, as each cult is part of a larger field of religion, including its rivals.

f. Ritual Specialists

A very small percentage of visitors to the pilgrimage centres of West Bengal claimed to be there simply as tourists, with no religious motive whatever. The balance had the intention of performing some religious activity while on pilgrimage. The goal of the pilgrimage of the latter group was generally the shrine centre of the sacred zone. Here they interacted with a group of specialist functionaries whose importance to pilgrims lies in their acknowledged expertise in working with and manipulating the symbolic environment of the shrine. In each of the three places of pilgrimage, one finds a group of religious specialists who hold exclusive rights to perform rituals on behalf of pilgrims to their shrine.

The characteristics of the ritual specialists are quite unremarkable. All are Brāhmaṇ by caste, all are priests by tradition and inheritance and none lays claim to any personal spiritual inspiration by virtue of their institutional position. The priests of all three temples are very much functionaries who perform formal ritual, as well as serving in the temple. Their activities are truly conventional in that their service to pilgrims is generally brief, perfunctory and mostly concerned with the proper

performance of formulae of worship. In their personal lives as well, most priests are married householders who seem indistinguishable from other Bengali men of comparable social status. The role of priest in Bengali pilgrimage can be summarised as one of formal intercessor between pilgrim and deity according to fixed and orthodox patterns of ritual.

It is noteworthy that the Sanskrit mantras, items of pūjā, etc., used by the priests in worship in all three places of pilgrimage are derived from published handbooks of priestcraft. This fact further underlines the adherence of the priesthood in these centres to established conventions of worship for their respective deities. It follows that the daily, weekly, monthly and annual festival calendars observed in each of the three places also conform to the established patterns for the different deities. Pilgrimage places are foci of religious behaviour in their wider cultural environment, and play a functional role in disseminating and maintaining the orthodox practices of their cult, so it is not surprising to find that the patterns of ritual observed in these centres are orthodox.

The performance of rituals by the priests of the temples provides another example of the differentiation of pilgrimage places from related non-pilgrimage institutions by means of intensification of that which is commonplace in the wider religious culture. The oblations with milk or water usually offered at Tarakeswar, the prostrations and kīrtana singing at Navadvip, and the goddess-pūjā and even animal sacrifices at Tarapith, which are the rites most commonly performed by or on behalf of pilgrims, are rituals that one commonly associates with these deities. What underlines the exceptional nature of the pilgrimage place as a nexus of ritual and symbolic activity within the larger system is the intensity, both in volume and depth, of the practices that take place there. The kīrtanas of Navadvip are larger, more frequent as well as more spirited and ecstatic,

than one finds in more outlying centres of Vaiṣṇava devotion. The group of individuals giving dharnā at any one time at Tarakeswar are acting with greater faith and self-sacrifice than the devotees of Śiva elsewhere who have not been so moved by their difficulties in life. The frequency of goat sacrifices at Tarapith as well as the great fervour and emotion associated with these and with the cremation ground, are more than one would encounter at a typical Śākta temple. The sacred zone of the place of pilgrimage is densely packed with orthodox ritual symbolism, which is brought to life in enthusiasm by the animated crowds of devotees and their priests. At no time is this more true than during the annual festivals of the shrine deity. The Gajan and Śivarātri are celebrated at many places in West Bengal, but with larger crowds and greater excitement at Tarakeswar. The same is true of Dola-yātrā and Rāsa-yātrā in Navadvip and the many goddess festivals at Tarapith.

Another sort of religious specialist was found to have an impact on pilgrimage practices in West Bengal. Bengali pilgrims are almost all worldly householders. In both the Śiva-Śākta and Vaiṣṇava traditions of pilgrimage, it is made explicit that it is not the act of pilgrimage alone which yields the highest fruits of the religious tradition. For this reason the more ardent renunciate seekers, who consititute a tiny fraction of the population in any case, are not frequently encountered on pilgrimage. But for reasons related to the religiosity of places of pilgrimage, and in turn contributing to that characteristic, renunciates frequently choose to live in places of pilgrimage. The sannyāsis of the Tarakeswar maṭha, the vairāgis of Navadvip and the sādhus resident in the Tarapith śmaśāna have chosen a specialised religious environment for the pursuit of their spiritual lives. For the pilgrimage-making householders, the presence of ascetics in the place

of pilgrimage adds to their belief in the holiness of the place. The matted locks or shaved heads, distinctive dress, facial markings and ardent behaviour of the ascetics make a further contribution to the intensified religious ambience of the pilgrimage centre. This feature is augmented by the development of institutions around the persons of ascetics, such as the maṭhas, ākhāḍās, ṭols and āśramas that are part of the institutionalised and routinised structure of the three Bengali places of pilgrimage.

g. Pilgrims

The pilgrims interviewed in the course of fieldwork totalled 1,457, plus 74 dharnā-jātris. The information that was collected about each pilgrim shows certain generalisations to be true about each of the places of pilgrimage. Each has its dominant character which expresses itself in the social characteristics of the majority of pilgrims, as well as many other more minor facets, each of which attracts a smaller group of pilgrims, perhaps different from the majority.

Almost all of the pilgrims interviewed were from West Bengal. All three places attract devotees from across the state, although unevenly. It is clear from a comparison of the places of origin of pilgrims to Tarapith and Navadvip that proximity alone does not define where one goes on pilgrimage. While Navadvip is much closer and more accessible to Calcutta than Tarapith, the number of pilgrims from Calcutta in Tarapith was thrice the number found in Navadvip. All three places are easily reached from any place in West Bengal; a pilgrim's choice of which place to visit is therefore determined by socio-cultural as well as geographic considerations.

The Vaiṣṇava cult in Bengal, from the time of Caitanya onwards, has

attracted devotees who are lower caste and rural in comparison to the dominant Śākta community.[1] These broadly generalised characteristics are found to be reflected in the pilgrim samples. A higher proportion of rural residents and a lower proportion of high caste pilgrims were interviewed in Navadvip than in either Tarakeswar or Tarapith. These findings correlate with cult. Globally, however, pilgrim characteristics revealed the overwhelming predominance of higher caste pilgrims. Only 217 pilgrims of the 1,457 interviewed (14.9%) were of the lowest status castes. Despite the possibility of lower caste individuals joining the Vaiṣṇava cult, the places most sacred to the cult are still predominantly the preserve of the caste elite, as 44.5% of the pilgrims were from the higher status castes. The orientation of Vaiṣṇavism away from rigid Brāhmaṇ-dominated casteism finds clearer expression in the higher incidence of pilgrimage by middle caste individuals (whose proportion of the pilgrim group in Navadvip doubled that of Tarapith and exceeded that of Tarakeswar) and the lower incidence of Brāhmaṇ pilgrimage (which halved that of

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[1]The evidence regarding Caitanya's attitude to caste indicates that he drew a distinction between social and devotional life. On the one hand, he did not challenge the established social order. He approved of his followers respecting norms of social behaviour, including where these were dictated by caste considerations. In his own time he welcomed Haridāsa, Rūpa and Sanātana, who were all of somewhat debased status, but arranged separate living quarters for them. There was some discrimination in the sharing of food with them as well. On the other hand, Caitanya asserted that worship, and hence the community of worshippers, was open to all. This does not imply that he advocated the elimination of the caste-ordered society, although the communality of worship frequently did result in a break-down of social and caste conventions. This was not Caitanya's object, but rather an incidental effect of his devotional religious movement. While members of all castes and social statuses were welcomed to practise bhakti with equal possibility of receiving its fruits, Caitanya was not concerned to disturb the hierarchical and discriminatory ordering of society. The net effect of this ambiguity is that different Vaiṣṇavas and groups within the community have interpreted Caitanya's attitude to caste differently. Some, particularly the followers of Advaita, have been conservative in matters of caste. Others, like the followers of Nityānanda, are reputed to be less so. Nevertheless, all agree on the admissibility of all Hindus, and even non-Hindus, to take the holy name in devotion. No one among the Vaiṣṇavas would suggest that any act of devotion, including pada-sevā, and hence pilgrimage, was not permissible for any individual because of caste status (cf. De 1961:108-9).

Tarapith and was lower than that of Tarakeswar) (Chart 2). In all cases, the truly lowest castes were hardly in evidence.

It is also possible to draw a correlation between the caste status of pilgrims and their places of origin. Datta (1962) has already demonstrated that the density of Brāhmaṇs residing in the districts of Bengal bordering the Ganges is disproportionately high for the state. The distribution of places of origin of the pilgrims was found to have a similar bias. Districts with a high proportion of tribal or scheduled caste population, such as Purulia and Bankura, were very little represented by pilgrims at any centre.

In Tarapith and Navadvip, the sectarian orientation of the pilgrims corresponded to the chief deity of the place, as one might expect. The predominance of Śāktas over Śaivas in Tarakeswar is also not surprising since the two cults are very closely related in Bengal, with the Śākta ascendant. Although no statistical or ethnographic facts can be adduced to support the assertion, my impression is that in Bengal, Śāktism is a cult which ordinarily provides initiation to householders, while Śaivism is more a cult of ascetics and renunciates. Since pilgrims are most frequently householders, those who claim an orientation in the direction of Śaiva-Śāktism are more likely to be Śākta. One also sees in this situation the predominance of the Vaiṣṇava and Śākta cults in Bengal.

Despite the occurrence of the anticipated correlation between cult and deity in all of the places of pilgrimage, it is noteworthy that the pilgrimages to each of the places are not undertaken exclusively by cult members. Significant minorities of pilgrims were found to be members of the non-dominant cults in each of the places of pilgrimage. This situation results from the lack of exclusive corporate identity

Chart 2: Caste ranking of pilgrims (in %)

Caste	Tarakeswar (excluding *dharnājātris*)	Navadvip	Tarapith
Brāhmaṇ	22.6	17.8	36.1
High caste (including Brāhmaṇs)	54.6	44.5	64.2
Middle castes	27.3	36.8	19.6
Lower castes	15.2	15.0	14.4

in the cults, and the general acceptance within the populace of all deities as powerful beings deserving of worship. While those who profess a cult bias prefer pilgrimage to the centres of that cult, they are not generally averse to visiting other centres should the opportunity or inspiration arise.

The notions of Sanskritization and Westernization have been treated as polar opposites in much of the literature on Indian society. Since pilgrimage is an ancient orthodox practice with strong links to the sacred Sanskritic texts, one might expect that pilgrims would exhibit very few of the characteristics of Westernization, such as high level secular education or occupation in non-traditional fields. In fact the opposite was found to be true. In each of the case studies, the educational status of pilgrims was found to be much above state averages. Even in Navadvip, with the highest proportion of rural and lower caste pilgrims, the statistics of education showed the pilgrim group to be better than averagely educated. The possible explanation for these figures in the heavy representation of urban residents among the pilgrims must be discounted because the educational characteristics of the pilgrims exceed the averages for Calcutta given in the 1971 census (see Appendix B, section 16, note). Although men in Bengal tend to have many more years in school than women, the figures on the educational status of the pilgrims do not reveal a male bias, as even with approximately 50% women interviewees, the statistics are above state averages for men.

One explanation for the higher than average educational characteristics of pilgrims lies in the occupations of the family bread-winners. A higher proportion of service, skilled and professional people than is average across the state were found to be pilgrims or to have families on pilgrimage. Again, even in Navadvip, where 76% of the pilgrims did not live

in municipal towns or cities, only 24.3% of the sample claimed to be supported by agriculture. Interviewing was completed in the winter months when agricultural workers are able to go on pilgrimage and so the figures do not represent a seasonal bias against agriculturally employed pilgrims. The occupations of pilgrims or their family supporters are indicative of the class nature of the institution. It appears that pilgrimages in West Bengal are most commonly the practice of the families of those who are sufficiently well-educated to hold middle-range jobs in government and private bureaucracies and enterprises. One finds here an explanation for the higher educational statistics noted among pilgrims, but also an unanticipated parallel between personal traits of Westernization among pilgrims and participation in a Sanskritic institution. The opposition between these two social processes is not supported by these findings.[1]

The purposes for which a pilgrim undertakes a pilgrimage, and the performance of rituals appropriate to those purposes, were also found to show a correlation with the cult and deity of the place of pilgrimage. The practical, worldly-effective attributes ascribed to Bābā Taraknātha (as a kāmadā liṅga) and Mā Tārā (as the Protectrix) revealed themselves in the practical purposes of the pilgrimages of many pilgrims, who came seeking health, wealth, social benefits and so on. A small minority of pilgrims had avowed purposes related to the accumulation of merit or the selfless propitiation of the deity. In Navadvip, in contrast, the broader devotional patterns of Vaiṣṇavism were in evidence in the responses of

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[1] As this is a minor, although interesting, point, it cannot be followed up at this time. The anthropological literature on the topic is quite rich, e.g., Lucy Caroll, "'Sanskritization', 'Westernization', and 'Social Mobility,'" Journal of Anthropological Research, 33, 4, 1977, 355-71. The theory comes in for criticism for postulating ahistorical and static levels of culture and religion in S.J. Tambiah, Buddhism and the Spirit-cults in North-east Thailand, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p.370

pilgrims regarding purposes. Few pilgrims to Navadvip revealed worldly goals for their pilgrimages. This correlation between the accepted character of the deity and the forms and purposes for approaching the deity indicates that a pilgrim's choice of shrine is influenced by the particular specialised character of the sacred place.

The rituals of pilgrimage[1] were found to be those common to Hindu temple worship. The two activities most often performed were pūjā and darśana. The former is the worship of the deity with stipulated materials, while the latter is the sighting of the deity or image, which in itself is a meritorious and beneficial act. Pilgrims will sometimes seek a darśana without making any offering. As the place of pilgrimage centres physically on the sacred zone, which in turn focuses on the inner sanctum of the main shrine, so is a pilgrim's ritual practice directed towards the shrine deity. The efficacy of pūjā is believed to manifest itself in the sacralised returns from the deity, i.e., prasāda. Pūjā, darśana, prasāda, plus pradakṣiṇa (circumambulation) were found to be parts of the complex of ritual behaviour in all three pilgrimages.

Certain consistencies can be isolated from these comparative generalisations regarding pilgrims. Pilgrims in West Bengal tend to be better educated and of a higher caste than the state averages, and are more likely to live in an urban centre and to work in an office or shop. More specifically, each of the pilgrim groups sampled was found to exhibit traits consistent with membership in the cult of the deity of that pilgrimage centre. It is thus valid to conclude that there exists a strong positive correlation between the ideological nature of the cult that dominates a pilgrimage centre and the

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[1] Tīrtha-taraṅgini, a Sanskrit work on the ritual for Hindu pilgrimages, has been translated into Bengali by Nityānanda Bhaṭṭācārya (Calcutta 1885). It was neither mentioned nor seen in any of the places of pilgrimage during fieldwork.

type of pilgrim (both in social characteristics and in purpose of pilgrimage) who journeys there.

h. The Journey

The pilgrim's journey from home to shrine is an integral, and in fact defining, aspect of all pilgrimages. The ethnography already discussed has shown that neither the deities of the pilgrimage shrines, nor the symbolism and rituals to be found there, differ significantly from those of non-pilgrimage places and practices in West Bengal. Nor are there social differences between pilgrims and the mass of West Bengalis sufficient to provide a basis for identifying pilgrimages as distinct from ordinary local temple-going. The journey is one consistent feature of the religious behaviour of pilgrimage which distinguishes it as a category of activity from others to which it is similar and related.

In making this statement regarding the journey, it appears that at least a part of the paradigm of pilgrimage is to be found in the behaviour which is the movement from home to shrine, regardless of the content of that action. This structural orientation is one that has dominated Victor Turner's writings on pilgrimage. Drawing upon van Gennep's theory of rites of passage, Turner stresses the state of 'liminality' which is created by the pilgrim's journey away from home. Turner's theory will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Suffice it here to note that the fact of journeying cannot be minimised in any discussion of pilgrimage. However, the fact that travelling to places of pilgrimage in West Bengal is performed by small groups of people usually associated by kinship or close friendship ties, and that pilgrimage is a personal, voluntary action, must make us cautious about analyses that do not give much explanatory currency to the motives and meanings that are

important to the individual participant himself.

Pilgrimages to Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith seldom involve journeys which are themselves structured as ritual behaviour. Notable minor exceptions are the jala-jātris of Tarakeswar and the group pilgrimages that are made to all three shrines. In the great majority of cases, the pilgrimage journey is undertaken by an individual or a small group of family and/or friends. In my experience of the pilgrimage routes of Bengal, it was unquestionably the case that these small pilgrimage parties are the most common travelling units. Turner (1978:13) suggests that parties of pilgrims tend to be "associational" rather than "primary" in social makeup. By this he means that pilgrim groups are most likely to be composed of unrelated individuals who have come together, perhaps even by chance, solely for the duration of the pilgrimage. This is the pilgrim party of Chaucer. The Bengali pattern does not conform to this model, however. Small parties of family and friends leave their homes together, carrying sufficient provisions for their own needs. They remain close together on their journey, not infrequently forming a chain of five or six people, each clinging to the clothing of the one in front and moving as one body. When spending the night in the place of pilgrimage, the travelling group makes every effort to arrange accommodation which will allow it to remain together. This preference is incorporated in the design of lodges and rest houses, which are built with many small rooms large enough to sleep three or four adults and the same number of children, if tightly packed. This primary pilgrimage 'cell' unit is seldom divided. Only in the culminating moments of the pilgrimage, when the pilgrim approaches the deity in the shrine, does he sometimes separate from his group to operate more independently. The cell unit tours the sacred zone of the place of pilgrimage together, jointly engages a single priest for their ritual

requirements, and arranges and pays for all services as a group. These characteristics reflect the fact that these cell units are closely connected by structural social bonds carried over from the home environment to the pilgrimage. In contradistinction to Turner's examples, pilgrimage parties in West Bengal tend to be primary rather than associational.

The absence of significant ritual content in the journey itself is also a feature of Bengali pilgrimages. Pilgrim groups proceed from home by regularly scheduled buses and trains for the most part, mingling with those travelling the same routes for other purposes. There are no specified activities which must be performed, except in the cases of the small number of pilgrims voluntarily practising austerities, such as the jala-jātris and Gajan sannyāsis. There are also very few instances of 'sacred ways,' routes of pilgrimage which are marked by the presence of sacra indicating the sacrality of the journey. There are some liṅgas, temples and way-stations on the jala-jātri route from Seorophuli to Tarakeswar, but these do not constitute stations on a ritual journey. Typically, it is only when the pilgrim has disembarked from train or bus and made his way to the sacred zone of the place of pilgrimage that he encounters the significant symbolic elements of the pilgrimage. These remain densely clustered in the sacred zone and radiate little beyond its bounds. The non-sacred zones of Tarakeswar and Navadvip are unremarkable secular and commercial towns, while that of Tarapith is typical of rural Bengali villages.

It is probably true that in the past, before the development of the modern road and rail systems that now make all of West Bengal relatively accessible, pilgrims travelled to more shrines en route to their destination. The rivers of Bengal were then the main axes of transportation,

and a journey to Navadvip, for example, would have taken the pilgrim through many sacred towns along the Ganges. The present pattern of rapid transit from home to the target shrine has reduced the incidence of pilgrims visiting more than one shrine on a pilgrimage.

One source from which pilgrims may draw feelings of being engaged on a sacred journey is the commercial activities that are to be found on board trains and buses which ply the routes to the pilgrimage centres. Vendors move along the aisles selling sweets and incense which the pilgrims will need for their worship at the shrines. Manufacturers have produced differing packaging for their products to appeal to the pilgrims, so that the incense-vendors on the train to Tarakeswar sell Bābā Tāraknātha incense, to Navadvip Śrī Kṛṣṇa incense and to Tarapith "Joy Ma Tara" brand. The beggars who ride these conveyances also tend to sing the praises of the deity towards which the transport is taking them. But those who sell their wares or beg, and so present religious symbolism to the pilgrims, indicating the sacred nature of the journey, do not especially stand out in the cacaphonous competition for the ears of travellers which is waged aboard the trains and buses of Bengal by the vendors of pens, medicines, newspapers, sweets, food and almost every other portable item.

i. Pilgrim and Deity

The motives for undertaking pilgrimage were found to show shrine-related variation. There were consistencies attributabel to the well-known characteristics of each shrine and deity. Thus the kāmadā liṅga of Tarakeswar had the highest proportion of pilgrims with vows for material or earthly gains, the bhakti centre of Navadvip saw pilgrims seeking darśana in devotion, and the siddha-pīṭha Tarapith was the site of

pilgrimage for the acquisition of spiritual powers (siddhis). These generalisations indicate the most striking traits of each deity, but the occurrence of pilgrimage motivated by devotion to Tarapith, a vow to Navadvip or for darśana to Tarakeswar, speaks to the absence of rigid specialisation among the deities and their powers. A great deity is not so limited as to be unable to work in certain fields, even if outside his own speciality.

Within the sacred zone, the interaction between pilgrim and deity is generally formal, usually via the mediation of a ritual specialist. Again in each shrine-centre there are consistencies between ritual patterns and the deity and cult. The offerings to Taraknātha are the conventional materials offered to Śiva: milk, Ganges water, bel leaf, duturā flower, sweets, etc. Caitanya is honoured as fully Kṛṣṇa, with left-sided prostrations, sweets, kīrtana and bhakti. The red flowers (China rose), vegetables, vermilion powder and iron bangles commonly given to Tārā are items of worship common to all Śākta temples. On this level, there is diversity in keeping with regional cultic patterns. On another level, however, the pattern of ritual involved in pilgrimage indicates a fundamental similarity in all three cults. The behaviour of pilgrims and priests follows the prescriptions of the particular shrine, which generally correspond to orthodox patterns for that deity. The actions of all, however, can be shown to comprise generally the three essential stages of purification, communication and receipt. In each example of a particular pilgrimage, and in the wide variety of individual practices undertaken therein, a great deal of elaboration on these stages takes place. Nevertheless, the pattern is traceable despite the variation of forms through which it is expressed.

In the earliest events of a pilgrimage, the pilgrim seeks to render

himself worthy to approach the deity. In some cases the journey itself is a purification by austerities, the heat of which (recalling that tapas, meaning asceticism, has a connotation of heat) is a purificatory fire. In another way, the movement away from home, and the severing, if only temporarily, of the perduring bonds which bind there is also an act of setting the self in a state of uncomplicated simplicity and hence purity. Some Hindu writers have seen in the pilgrimage journey the opportunity for the preparation of the devotee's mind for the proper attitudes needed in the place of pilgrimage. One[1] laments modern transportation which has had the virtue of making more pilgrimage places accessible, but has destroyed the contemplative aspects of the journey.

The most concrete and often repeated ritual of purification associated with pilgrimage is the bath which the pilgrim performs in the place of pilgrimage itself, prior to approaching the deity. It is also common practice to wear new or at least clean clothing. Ordinarily, pilgrims will not enter the shrine wearing clothing which they were wearing when they urinated or defecated. Menstruating women are generally barred from approaching the deity. To do so is to carry the pollution of bodily acts, which Hindus hold to be defiling, to the deity. It is for the same reason that persons considered intrinsically impure, such as those of untouchable caste, Muslims, etc., are traditionally barred from entering any Hindu temple. Although laws have theoretically opened access to temples to all Hindus,[2] it is clear from the interviews with pilgrims that the old notions excluding the impure from temples have retained vitality. The Ḍoms of Tarapith cannot enter the inner sanctum of the temple. Muslims and other

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[1]Editorial, Prabuddha Bharata, January 1958, 3-8.

[2]viz. Untouchability Offences Act, 1955. Under sections 3-7 of the Act, social disability in respect of entry and worship at public temples was removed.

non-Hindus, such as myself, are not allowed into the sanctum of Tarakeswar and one shrine in Navadvip, although it is accepted that the deities of both places will hear the entreaties of people of such defiled categories, but from a distance. Pilgrims generally avoid polluting foods, such as meat, while on pilgrimage. They abstain from sexual acts, and are conscious of the desirability of adhering to norms of social behaviour: they give charity, avoid passionate (especially angry) behaviour and seek to focus their minds and activities on the religious aspect of their journey. When pilgrims enter the sacred place, the actions of purification multiply, affecting cleanliness, clothing and bodily defilements. To the extent that a person has purified himself, within the possibilities, to that extent will he be allowed to personally approach the deity, and to that extent can he expect to accomplish that for which he approaches.

This ideal of purity, with its outward form in cleanliness, bathing and ritual status, has an inner dimension as well. While attempts to make the self pure are efforts to reduce the ordinarily defiled states of life, and are hence purification <u>from</u> sin and impurity, the pilgrim also strives to accomplish a purification <u>of</u> his devotion, so that his mind and behaviour might also reach an ideal. This latter form of purification is especially important to those pilgrims who have not come on pilgrimage for any immediate gain or out of any pressing difficulty, but for reasons of devotion or the accumulation of merit. Doctrines which stress devotionalism, such as that of the Vaiṣṇavas, are explicit in stipulating the benefits that accrue to the pure-hearted devotee, and so efforts towards a pure devotionalism yield their rewards.

The purificatory acts and status of the pilgrim prepare him for the next stage of his pilgrimage -- communication with the deity. The purified

pilgrim is allowed to proceed to this next stage because he has been cleansed, and so will not defile the deity or temple. He is also more likely to reap the fruits of his actions because of his undefiled state. While one might hide certain impurities (by falsely claiming membership of a higher caste or by not admitting to having committed defiling acts), these cannot be hidden from the deity and doom the purposes of the pilgrimage. The deity will hear the plea of, receive the devotion of, or yield the fruit of the ritual to those who have taken the correct steps, in body, mind and life, to prepare themselves as best they can for their audience. Here we see one aspect of the emphasis on the individual and his actions which is important in pilgrimage.

Following purification, the pilgrim makes a direct and personal approach to the deity. This action will take different forms, according to the deity, cult and the pilgrim's purpose. In Tarakeswar and Tarapith, a standard jātri-pūjā is performed on behalf of most pilgrims. This ritual is performed at Navadvip as well, although in the latter centre the mediating role of priests is somewhat less, since a devotee may well approach any image and prostrate in devotion without mediation. Vaiṣṇavism places more emphasis on the quality of the act than on its ritual correctness. In the temples of Taraknātha and Tārā, and in the pūjā rituals which pilgrims do have performed on their behalf in Navadvip, the intercession performed by the priests on behalf of the pilgrims takes a highly conventional form. In part this reflects the professionalism of the priests, but in fact no more is required of them than to translate the efforts, acts and words of the pilgrim into a form which will be more readily acceptable to the deity. The deity will act according to the pilgrim's actual worth and merit. In all three places of pilgrimage, a pilgrim who seeks a special boon from the deity has the priest

perform a _sankalpa pūjā_, in which a wish is made. It is also conventional for pilgrims to circumambulate the shrine, generally three times clockwise.

In all cases, the pilgrimage journey reaches its climax when the pilgrim is finally presented before the image of the deity. The god that he finds is the powerful, miracle-working, salvation-granting, awake, living deity of the place of pilgrimage. Within the inner sanctum, the pilgrim can communicate directly with the supernatural, present in the world of men in an accessible form.

The last stage of a pilgrim's activities has both a ritual and a phenomenal form. A part of what the pilgrim has offerred in _pūjā_ is always returned to him as sacralised. It is believed that to eat sacralised food (_prasāda_), to wear a string, bangle or amulet infused with the power of the deity by contact with its image, or to carry a flower returned from the _pūjā_ will bring about the pilgrim's desired goal. It is meritorious to receive and consume, wear or carry these ritually energised objects. Phenomenally, the return from the deity is the granting of the wish, the yielding of the boon or the fruit of the pilgrimage. The miracle stories that are repeated about all three places of pilgrimage, the reputations of the deities as being easily pleased or attentive, and the presence in the place of pilgrimage of other pilgrims fulfilling vows for wishes granted by the deity, present the pilgrim with a clear understanding of what to expect from this deity. The pilgrim completes his pilgrimage with a material return from the deity, but usually with no more than anticipation that his phenomenal return will be received.

This pattern holds true for all varieties of pilgrimage observed in the three places here under review. Whether the pilgrim seeks a material goal or the accumulation of merit, he observes this pattern as the central

behavioural core of his pilgrimage. Around this core, through a multitude of rituals and practices, pilgrims seek goals generally associated with all religious practice, i.e., assistance in coping with and influencing the greater forces of existence, which impress themselves upon mankind as life, death, disease, creation, destruction and so on.

The purificatory acts of the pilgrimage do not find a counterpart in any rituals of desacralisation taking place before the pilgrim departs from the sacred centre. This fact may be understood as the pilgrims' desires and attempts to carry away with them as much of the pure status of the pilgrimage as possible. The purification brought about by pilgrimage is not of a different type or divorced from the ideals of home social life, and so it is desirable that the status achieved in the sacred place be taken away with the pilgrim, to be maintained as long as possible. The notions of purity involved in pilgrimage are those commonly advocated as Bengali Hindu religious ideals; they are best seen not as a sacralisation but as the achievement of an ideal human state.

The great variety of rituals, symbols, actions, social characteristics, specialists, etc., involved in any one pilgrimage can mask the underlying operational pattern common to all of them. Personal motives, needs and expectations will vary from individual to individual, cult to cult, region to region. Pilgrimage provides a vehicle for the treatment of these various intentions by offering a structure which can be adapted to a wide variety of uses. Every pilgrimage is a search; where, for what and by what means one searches will vary in accord with the individual and the specialised characters of the deities and their sacred places. But it is always true of pilgrimage that the search relies upon the actions of a deity, who is most effectively approached in his sacred abode.

If pilgrimage is characterised as a search, then it is more accurately a personal search. Pilgrimage in West Bengal is a totally voluntary act motivated by the needs and desires of the individual who undertakes it. While the pilgrim may travel to and from the centre in the company of others, the emphasis on the individual is evident in the stages of the pilgrimage pattern within the sacred zone. The pilgrim purifies himself alone, approaches the deity singly and hopes to have the deity do that which he as an individual desires. This pattern is most clearly represented in the common practice of making vows to the deity. The pilgrim establishes a quasi-contractual relationship with the deity by vowing to perform actions that are accepted means for pleasing the deity in return for a personal boon. It is a reciprocal agreement based on actions and rewards for both parties.

Many considerations influence whether the deity will yield that which the pilgrim desires. Pilgrimage deities seem not to have any capriciousness about them. The ritual status of the pilgrim, the purified state in which he approaches the deity, the propitiousness of the moment of approach (whether astrologically auspicious or not), etc., all affect the outcome of the pilgrim's quest. Priests in the pilgrimage centres will sometimes curse a pilgrim who has not given enough dakṣiṇā by calling on the deity to disappoint the pilgrim. One very critical factor which influences the deity's response to the pilgrim's request is the consciously cultivated state of mind of the pilgrim. Both the Śiva-Śākta and Vaiṣṇava traditions lay stress on the personal qualities of humility, faith, submission and devotion of the pilgrim as determinants of the success of a pilgrimage. The Vaiṣṇavas say that a Muslim who gives a flower with true Kṛṣṇa bhakti receives more of Kṛṣṇa's love than a Brāhmaṇ who recites the Śrimad Bhāgavatam with pride and conceit. When the question of who wins the love of Caitanya by pilgrimage was put to Nadiavinoda Goswamy, a priest of Navadvip, he told the following story:

Once, during the time of my grandfather, the local Mahārānī was about to come on pilgrimage to Navadvip. She was a proud and arrogant woman who was strict with her subjects, and so when news circulated that she was coming, the local people were concerned that she would use the opportunity of the kīrtana gathering to harass people. My grandfather told them not to fear. She would undoubtedly give a large donation to the temple, but she would not attend the kīrtana. The Mahārānī gave a donation of Rs.100, and did not attend the kīrtana. My grandfather knew that a wealthy, powerful and proud person such as she would give material but would not open their heart to the devotion of singing Hari's name. Hers was an effort to buy the love of Mahāprabhū, which is reserved for the poor, humble and weak.

The fault of the Mahārānī was to be outwardly pious by performing pilgrimage and giving a large donation, but inwardly undevoted, as evidenced by her failure to attend the kīrtana. There are innumerable stories on this theme.

In the Śiva-Śākta traditions, the theme of devotion is present but is of less overiding significance than among the Vaiṣṇavas. The attitude that pilgrims conventionally adopt towards Śiva and Śakti is more of a submissive faithfulness than active devotion. The songs to Tārā and the life history of Vāmākhepā and Ramakrishna discussed regarding Tarapith are examples of this tradition. The theme of faith is very apparent in the miracle stories told about dharnā-jātris to Tarakeswar. The first two tell of successful dharnās and the third of a pilgrim whose wish was not granted.

1. A dharnā-jātri was performing dharnā in the nāṭa-mandira according to all the rules. He was suffering from an intestinal disorder which many doctors had failed to cure, and was now hoping to win Bābā's grace by his self-sacrifice. He lay in the nāṭa-mandira for four days without taking food or drink. On the fourth night, as he lay sleeping before the temple, he saw in a dream that a huge sannyāsi, with matted hair, a string of beads and a trident stood before him. The sannyāsi said to him: "In the morning you will find a black dog before the temple gate. In his mouth he will be holding a baiguni (an aubergine slice fried in batter). Eat what remains of the baiguni and you will be cured." In the morning the man went to the spot where the dog was to be, and indeed there was a black dog with a baiguni in his mouth. The man tried to catch hold[1] of the dog,

[1]The story-teller, an elderly priest and nivāsa-owner, claimed to have seen all this take place. The dharnā-jātri was too slow in catching the dog, he said, because he had too much sexual intercourse with his sister (an insult). The motif of 'catching hold' of the dog echoes the meaning of the word dharnā, catching hold. Had the jātri succeeded in catching the dog, he would have captured Bābā, who would then have had to grant him any boon within his powers.

but failed. The dog dropped the baiguni as he ran. The dharnā-jātri picked up the remainder of the baiguni, ate it, and was instantly cured.

2. There was once a rich young man from Jhargram in Midnapore who owned a large area of farmland. His aunt was covetous of this property, and so poisoned the boy. He suffered from acidity and indigestion for four years. Having failed to find a cure in any kind of medical treatment, he undertook to come to Tarakeswar by train to give dharnā. While on the train, he was pickpocketed, and all his money was taken. He arrived in Tarakeswar penniless, but went to the temple anyway to begin his dharnā. The temple officer (gaddi-wāla) refused to allow him to begin the rituals because he did not have the money to pay the dharnā fee. The boy tried to begin anyway, and so sat outside the nāṭa-mandira and fasted. After two days he became very ill, so ill that he couldn't even talk. He gave up his austerities and went in search of food. A local boy found him, gave him some puffed rice, then arranged a place for the boy in a lorry going to Jhargram. The boy went home to Midnapore, but a short while later returned to Tarakeswar and began a proper dharnā. On the second night he received Bābā's dayā (kindness). He had a dream that he would awake in the morning with something in his hand. He should eat this and be cured. He awoke to find a small iron bar in his hand. He swallowed it as instructed. In the dream he had also been told that in a previous life he had died owing money to a certain dhopa (washerman). He was to go to the house of this man and wash the dhopa's feet and those of his wife. The dhopa would then give him water which he was to drink. This he did, and was totally cured.

3. An old woman had lost her son many years before. She had searched by every possible means to discover his whereabouts, but to no avail. At last, in desperation, she turned to Bābā for help. She came to Tarakeswar and began to perform dharnā. On the third night a sādhu came to her in a dream and told her to go to Bābā's flower garden to pick some leaves from a certain tree. These she was to have bound into an amulet which she was to wear on her arm. Her son would then return to her. The woman hurried to Bābā's flower garden and searched for the tree. When she found it, she was terrified to see that it was covered from top to bottom by a mass of writhing, poisonous snakes. She thought to herself that she must have misunderstood the sādhu, for she could not collect the necessary leaves from such a tree. She returned to the nāṭa-mandira and resumed her dharnā. That night, the sādhu appeared to her again. He told her that she had failed to carry out Bābā's directions because she did not trust sufficiently in his guidance. The danger of the snakes was mere illusion. Bābā would not have let them harm her if she had approached the tree. Now, the sādhu said, her son would never return and he did not.

The first story is of a variety of which I collected several in Tarakeswar. In all of them, a strange, often polluting, medicine is prescribed as a cure by Bābā, who appears to the dharnā-jātri in a dream. In one, a man was told to eat the left-over food of a washerwoman (a debased caste) who had just given birth (a defiled state). Others told of being instructed to eat a frog,

snake and human excrement and saliva. The second story again echoes this theme but introduces another recurrent element in these stories: obstacles to the performance of the pilgrimage rituals. Many stories tell of such obstacles. One relates that a man prostrating as he travelled from the Ganges to Tarakeswar found himself having to stretch out across railway tracks as a train approached. He did so, and the train miraculously halted. The last story combines these two themes, showing the obstacles encountered by the pilgrim, the unusual medicine miraculously prescribed, and the results, in this case unsuccessful, of the pilgrim's actions in accord with the divine prescription. The factor in these stories which is significant for the discussion of the personal attitudinal and behavioural components of pilgrimage in West Bengal is the element of demonstrated faith which accompanies the successful receipt of the desired fruit of ritual. Dharnā-jātris follow a conventional pattern of behaviour as pilgrims (when the boy in the second story broke these, he became ill), which entails daily baths and strict austerities (both purificatory) in the hope of having a personal encounter with the deity. Following the restrictions is a necessary but not sufficient condition for receiving Bābā's dayā. The teller of the last story explained the restriction against dharnā-jātris speaking to one another by saying that if they speak, they are likely to utter falsehoods, which would defile them. The pilgrim can expect to achieve his desired goal if he performs all of the purificatory rituals correctly and acts with sufficient faith to overcome obstacles and to do that which the deity commands, regardless of its seeming danger or distastefulness. The same story-teller echoed the story of the Vaiṣṇava Mahārānī in Navadvip when he said that a rich man who spends a lot of money in Tarakeswar might not receive Bābā's blessing, while a poor man who could not even afford to buy a new dhoti for his dharnā, might be blessed if his heart is pure.

Priests and officials at the Tarakeswar temple agree that only 20 to 30 per cent of dharnā-jātris receive the ādeśa (prescription). Of these, some fail to carry out the instructions and so fail in their purpose. The number of miracles that are expected in Tarakeswar is few, and the reason is attributed to the lack of pure faith in the devotees. Those with pure faith, it is maintained, are never disappointed.

Faith and other cultivated mental states (e.g., devotion, submission, etc.) are often presented by pilgrims and priests as explanations for the success or failure of pilgrimages. This type of explanation exists alongside and in direct, unresolved opposition to a belief in the automatic efficacy of ritual. In Tarakeswar I was told that the festival of Sivarātri is held in commemoration of the night on which a hunter, lost in the woods, climbed a bel tree and caused bel leaves to fall on a liṅga at the base of the tree. This act, committed without intention by the hunter, pleased Śiva, and he granted the hunter mokṣa (liberation). Similarly, the story of Vaśiṣṭha stipulates that if the Tārā-mantra is repeated a certain number of times in the right location, release follows automatically. Belief in the inherent effect of ritual is less evident among the Vaiṣṇavas, although pūjā, offerings (dāna), formal obeisance (e.g., praṇama) and calendrical fasts and festivals are regularly observed with the expectation of effect. The Navadvīpa Māhātmya of Kedarnātha Datta (quoted in Goswamy n.d.:6) states

> He who goes to Navadvip even for the purpose of work
> He no longer suffers any more human births.
> In every step of moving in Navadvip
> He gets the fruit obtainable from a crore {10,000,000}
> of sacrifices.

It is significant that individuals who expressed a belief in the necessity of practising cultivated mental states would, when questioned, generally admit to the effectiveness of ritual and vice versa. Rather than being a conflict needing resolution, these two ideas represent conceptions about the different ways in which the human and divine interact. Hindu philosophy contains similar

disjunctions in the various paths (margas) laid out as ideal behaviour for individuals. We can see here the way in which Hindu philosophy, with its diversity of concepts and apparent contradictions, is deployed in practical circumstances: in different contexts and to answer different needs, different explanations can be employed and considered acceptable, even by the same individuals.

j. Conclusion

In summation, then, the comparison of Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith reveals that actors, processes and arenas all play important roles in the institutional complex of pilgrimage. More specifically, one finds geographical places, myths, symbols, structured roles, rituals and deities all contributing to the various facets of the institution. Each of the three places was found to be different from the others in its content in each of these categories. Yet certain structural homologies can be identified as underlying these superficial variations. Each place is clearly differentiated from the others in form, yet functions in processual ways which draw upon a common paradigm of pilgrimage.

The place of pilgrimage was found to be a site at which an event taken to be indicative of divine presence took place. This initial event becomes institutionalised in myths which adopt patterns in line with the pre-existent mythic themes of the cult that claims the pilgrimage as its own. The events that are celebrated in myth account for the sacredness of the place, which is given form as a sacred zone centring on a shrine and cut off from its profane surroundings. The sacred zone is an area of densely packed religious symbolism and activities, all of which focus on the deity's shrine. This shrine is axial for the pilgrims and their pilgrimage. It is the focus of all pilgrim concerns. The image of the central deity is axial in another

way as the point of intersection of divine and terrestrial realms. Here is the unbounded deity endlessly present upon earth.

The place of pilgrimage is a locale of unique religious character, yet it is still a part of its more widespread religious tradition. Its particular location, attributable to the set of historical events which took place there, contributes to its uniqueness. The continuities between its myths, rituals and symbols and those of the universal Hindu pattern link it to the parent religious tradition, most closely with the regional pattern of West Bengal. The notion of intensification has also proven useful as a way of identifying how the factors that are shared by pilgrimage places and non-pilgrimage institutions are given differentiated character in the place of pilgrimage. Particularly in symbol and ritual, it has been found that the pilgrimage place sets itself off from the broader religious fabric by the practice of a more condensed and higher-intensity version of that known and practised elsewhere. Intensification was found to proceed on several levels -- sociologically: the very nature of the place of pilgrimage as an important religious centre makes it an arena of intensified religious activity; theologically: the conceptions about the deity attribute an extra measure of holiness and power to the particular manifestation of the deity believed to live eternally in the pilgrimage centre; and psychologically: the experiences of the pilgrim are generally affected by these sociological and theological considerations, and tend to be personal experiences of heightened devotion, fervour and expectancy, commensurate with the concentrated religiosity of the place of pilgrimage.

From the perspective of the pilgrim, the practice of pilgrimage necessarily involves a journey, since a pilgrim is a _jātri_ (one who goes). The journey begins amid the connexions and entanglements of the domestic social setting, then moves out and away from these, across distance, to a place that is set

apart from the complex profanities of everyday life. There the pilgrim participates as an individual in events composed of orthodox symbolism and ritual guided by professional specialists. The purpose of these activities is to structure a process whereby the individual renders himself fit to approach the deity, and then does so, in the hope of initiating divine action on his behalf. The transactions that the pilgrim may make with the deity are highly variable and reflect the circumstantial and socio-cultural factors dominant in the individual's life. The character of the deity in the place of pilgrimage is a condensed expression of the motives for pilgrimage to that centre, since pilgrims choose to go to centres where the known character of the deity is appropriate to the purposes of their pilgrimage.

The three pilgrimages in this study are closely related. The areas from which they draw pilgrims are similar, in both geographical and social dimensions. The cults and deities are also aspects of one religious tradition. Philosophically, all three pilgrimages draw upon a common stock of fundamental texts in the Vedas, Purāṇas, Upaniṣads, Epics, etc., with resultant shared imagery and symbolism. The generalisations that have emerged from this comparison point towards features which seem fundamental to the deep-level structure of pilgrimage. Before commenting on these, it will be useful to review the sociological literature that has dealt with the subject of pilgrimage. These works may provide guidance for distinguishing that which is paradigmatic from that which is common to all three West Bengali case studies, but is characteristic of West Bengal or India rather than structural to pilgrimage.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SOCIOLOGY OF PILGRIMAGE

The subtleties and complexities of the pilgrimage tradition in West Bengal defy simplistic analysis. The wide variety of belief and behaviour makes difficult the task of indicating what is unitary amid the more evident diversity. In this chapter, sociological theories of pilgrimage suggested by various authors will be reviewed. These analyses of pilgrimage can be discussed under three headings:

a. functionalist analyses,

b. theories of individual motivation, and

c. the theories of Victor Turner.

Later (d.), the principal perspectives on pilgrimage already available in the literature will be treated as hypotheses to be tested against the West Bengali ethnographic data. This exercise will reveal the applicability of these theories to the particular case, and hence indicate something about their universal applicability. A critical look at the ethnography in the light of existing theories will also help to provide perspectives for the analysis of the West Bengali pilgrimage tradition, and so contribute to the search for the most fundamental characteristics of pilgrimage practice.

a. Functionalist Analyses

In the literature, the social functions of pilgrimage have been seen to be of three types. There are those authors who have seen pilgrimage as

(i) a force in national or regional social integration, cross-cutting group boundaries. Others have focused on (ii) the effects of pilgrimage on the group of participants themselves, and how the institution functions to develop or maintain values and ideas held by the group. A third focus of analysis (iii) has been on the replication of existing social patterns in pilgrimage practices by which the institution is an enactment of the organisation of relations among the various groups in society. The practice of pilgrimage serves to reinforce existing patterns of social relations within the area from which the pilgrimage draws pilgrims.

(i) Pilgrimage as Social Integrator

The most frequented place of pilgrimage in Mexico is the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In his article on the cult of this shrine, Eric Wolf (1958:34) states: "Occasionally, we encounter a symbol which seems to enshrine the major hopes and aspirations of an entire society. Such a master symbol is represented by the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint." Wolf then documents the various social groups and historical events which have some manner of attachment to this national symbol. The involvement of Mexicans with the Virgin takes many forms, one of the most important of which is pilgrimage to her shrine. Wolf's conclusion regarding the function of this cultic symbol is that it "links together family, politics and religion; colonial past and independent present; Indian and Mexican...It is, ultimately, a way of talking about Mexico: a 'collective representation' of Mexican society" (p.38). The integrative function of the pilgrimage to Guadalupe is further documented by the Turners, who list the many organised parties of pilgrims that have come to the shrine, and point out that "every diocese in Mexico has its allocated pilgrimage day in the annual schedule, as do hundreds of individual parishes from all over Mexico" (1978:95).

The integrating effect of major pilgrimages has been found elsewhere as well. Obeyesekere (1966:23) says of pilgrimage in Sri Lanka that "in these sacred places, Buddhists from all parts of the country meet together in a commonality of worship...which transfers the individual or group from the limited moral community of the village to the larger moral community of the civilisation. Its role in building up a sense of universal religious brotherhood transcending national barriers (comparable with that found at Catholic places of pilgrimage or the Moslem's Mecca) and in fostering a sense of national consciousness in feudal type societies is obvious."

A similar statement is frequently made regarding pilgrimage in India. Brijnarain Sharma (1966:333-34) attributes this function to pilgrimage by saying:

> the institution made the people realize that India is culturally one and offered them the chance of acquiring a wide outlook by travelling to distant places of pilgrimage and exchanging views and news in course of their long journeys.

Swami Pavitrananda writes in The Cultural Heritage of India (1956:499):

> One of the greatest services the institution of pilgrimage has rendered to India as a whole is that it has impressed upon all people her fundamental unity in the midst of apparent diversity. It is through this institution that the country has been transformed into a vivid and visible reality.

Yet another author, Swaprasad Bhattacharya,[1] says:

> As he worships before the Lord at Banaras, or Balaji the Lord at Tirupati, or the Great Mother at Conjeeveram, the pilgrim comes to see that all are equal before the Lord, in whatever form or place the deity may be worshipped. As the pilgrims from all over India mix together and worship at the great, ancient sites, they come to know and cherish the fundamental unity of this land of Bharata {India} made sacred in so many places by the presence of the Lord.

Several anthropological studies of Indian society have drawn similar conclusions. In the article "Networks and Centres in the Integration of

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[1]In Morgan (ed.) The Religion of the Hindus, quoted in John R. Hinnells and Eric J. Sharpe, Hinduism, Oriel Press, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1972, p.112; see also K.K. Pillay, "The Temple as a Cultural Centre," Journal of Oriental Research, 29, 1959-60, pp.83-94.

Indian Civilisation" (1958), Bernard S. Cohn and McKim Marriott include pilgrimages as a type of religious network (p.4) and sacred centres as important foci within them (p.6). Pilgrims moving within these networks by visiting pilgrimage centres are integrated into the national culture. The authors also point out that the pilgrim may learn an additional lesson about India's diversity in the sacred centre. Morris E. Opler (1956) found that the residents of Senapur village "know about the famous shrines and temples in distant parts of the country and aspire to see at least some of them before they die" (p.7). Opler perceives the diversity that preserves the distinctive character of village and region, but also the vehicles, like pilgrimage, which bring local villagers into the largest social units of Hinduism and India.

The function of pilgrimage in contributing to national unity has been noted outside India as well. Charles F. Keyes, writing about Thailand, states that "whereas the political topography of northern Thailand was fragmented into a number of small discrete principalities (mụang), the sacred topography, defined by the twelve shrines, united people into successively larger moral communities" (1975:85). The integrative function of pilgrimage has also been seen in the cultural homogenising effect of the repeated mixing of different social groups at national religious centres, as at Esquipulas in Guatemala (Fought 1969) and at pilgrimage centres that are holy to both Jews and Muslims in Morocco (Voinot 1948).

Pilgrimage does not cross-cut local social units to forge larger communities only at the level of the nation-state. The unit for which the centre of pilgrimage is a focus may be either larger or smaller than the nation. Clothey's study of the deity Murukan in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu finds that "Murukan's current popularity, in no small measure, is derived from the fact that the god has been so thoroughly identified

with Tamil Nadu" historically, geographically, and ideologically (1972:93). This single deity, enshrined in several pilgrimage centres throughout the state, stands as a symbol for Tamil Nadu and its people as does the Virgin of Guadalupe for Mexico. Burton Stein, in an article entitled "Circulation and the Historical Geography of Tamil Country" (1977), reaches similar conclusions in finding pilgrimage practices to be a feature of Tamil regional identity. The study of a pilgrimage centre of the Lingayat sect in South India by C. Parvathamma (1971) suggests that pilgrimage forges a cross-cutting social bond within the local area. While the region is rife with sectarianism and factionalism, the pilgrimage is non-sectarian and is joined by all segments of the local population. Parvathamma attributes this unifying role of the Kshetra pilgrimage to the fact that the temple is involved in non-sectarian agricultural rites which concern all members of the population. The pilgrimage is thus a forum for the performance of rituals which are relevant to the largest collectivity, since agriculture concerns all rural people. The divine favour that the pilgrimage is intended to elicit takes the form of rain, which is a benefit to all.[1]

A third example of an analysis which considers pilgrimage to function in bringing about regional cultural homogeneity is Babb's research on Chhatisgarh in Madhya Pradesh. He states:

> Visits...to well-known temple centres are an important dimension of the religious life of rural Chhatisgarh, and it is quite likely that the pilgrimage pattern has contributed greatly to the formation of regional uniformities in Chhatisgarhi religion, and has provided the most important medium through which pan-Indian traditions have diffused through the Chhatisgarh countryside.
> (1975:19)

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[1]Alan Beals reaches a similar conclusion in his study of interlocal festivals in South India, which serve "within the village as a device for compelling a periodic cessation of party conflict and for publicly demonstrating the absence of such conflict" (Alan R. Beals, "Conflict and Interlocal Festivals in a South Indian Region," in E.B. Harper (ed.), Aspects of Religion in South Asia, Journal of Asian Studies, 23, June, 1964, p.113.

This conclusion is similar to that of Vidyarthi, who considered Gayā to be a centre for the diffusion of the great tradition among the populace.

In general, functionalist views of pilgrimage in India have adopted one of two theoretical perspectives. One sees pilgrimage as a process whereby the pilgrim, as representative of the little tradition, imbibes aspects of the great tradition in the place of pilgrimage. The other changes the terminology but not the concept. According to this second view, pilgrimage places are centres for the Sanskritization of the populace. Srinivas himself succinctly expresses this idea (1967:74):

> Every great temple and pilgrim centre was a source of Sanskritization, and the periodic festivals or other occasions when pilgrims gathered together at the centre provided opportunities for the spread of Sanskritic ideas and beliefs.

Both theories are very simplistic. There is no necessity that the pilgrimage place be a centre of orthodoxy, Sanskritic culture, the great tradition or any other specified characteristics. Heterodox and unorthodox versions of Hinduism are also celebrated in certain centres. To cite one example from my own data, it is quite well-accepted that the Vaiṣṇavism of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas as found in Navadvip is a regionally-specific version of Viṣṇu worship. But as was said in the introductory chapter, the role of pilgrimage centres in the dissemination of culture is an important topic which must await more detailed investigation elsewhere.

Some pilgrimages transcend national boundaries and therefore function to bring together communities larger than the nation-state. The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca is obligatory for all Muslims of every country, and links all of the separate communities of Muslims into one community of the Faithful centred on Mecca. Siegel (1969:25) quotes an Indonesian Muslim religious leader as saying: "This is the pilgrimage. Thus we come together village by village, mosque by mosque and nation by nation. The

whole world comes together." Siegel concludes: "The pilgrims, dressed in identical white robes and thinking of the sacrifice, are an image of Muslim unity" (1969:272).

Many Christian pilgrimages, particularly those to Jerusalem and Rome, have also been seen to diminish the national differences among pilgrims by bringing them together for common performances in centres which are of significance to the supra-national cultural unit.

There are aspects of the integrative function of pilgrimage which are sometimes consciously employed to forge larger community bonds. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of India, installed the liṅga in the Somanatha jyotirliṅga temple in 1951, following a decision by nationalist leader Sardar Vallabhai Patel that it should be rebuilt as a national symbol (Munshi 1965:67). A frequently cited reason for Muhammed's inclusion of the hājj to Mecca as one of the pillars of Islam is that he recognised the important integrative effect pilgrimage would have on the dispersed and divided international community of Muslims.[1]

Another example of an obligatory pilgrimage intended to bind a community together is the historical practice of the Jews of Palestine visiting the temple in Jerusalem thrice every year, at the festivals of Passover, Shavuot (Weeks) and Sukkot (Tabernacles). These are known as the 'pilgrim festivals', and their observance is traced to Deuteronomy (xvi, 16):

> Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles.

Popper (1918:23) says of these regular congregations in Jerusalem:

> The pilgrimage had also a political importance. The close association in a common purpose of large numbers of people from different tribes

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[1]See Kamal (1964); a frequently cited work in this context is C. Snouck Hurgronje, Het Mekkaansche Feest, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1880.

> and communities afforded the basis for the development of a more permanent national unity and played a part...in ancient pan-Hebraism.

(ii) Pilgrimage and Group Solidarity

The operative function by which pilgrimage cross-cuts social divisions to unite larger communities of co-religionists is related to that which brings about group solidarity among actual participants in given pilgrimage events. Melford Spiro (1970:470) found that in Burma:

> ...pilgrimages and pagoda festivals, which lead to the exchange of contacts and information on a district- and even nationwide basis, are one of the most important instruments for the promotion of social and cultural integration beyond the village level.

In Spiro's view, the rituals of festivals and pilgrimages are group performances which wield group solidarity by means of collective, cooperative actions. Sopher's study of pilgrimage patterns in the Indian state of Gujerat (1968) reveals that pilgrimage behaviour tends to coincide with social group ideologies, so that one sub-group of Gujeratis frequent a certain type of shrine while other sub-groups tend to make pilgrimages to other types of shrines. The effect of this pattern is a reinforcement of sense of group membership and of the characteristic group ideology and consciousness.

Irawati Karve's anecdotal report on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur, Maharashtra (1962) reveals that all of the pilgrims to the shrine of Viṭhobā Bhave were Maharashtrians. She makes a case for the integrative functions of the pilgrimage, although she notes that untouchable castes were restricted to their own pilgrimage parties (p.17) and that the social behaviour of Brāhmaṇ pilgrims retained its pollution-conscious exclusivity (p.19).

Among the Berbers of Morocco studied by Rabinow (1975), the <u>musem</u> is an annual collective pilgrimage to the tomb of the patron saint of

the tribe. Rabinow says: "The goal of the musem is to renew the contact with the saint; it is the only time during the year that these groups come together..." (1975:91). The rituals of the musem are meant to bring about a feeling of collectivity among the tribal participants, although in actual fact the event frequently dissolves into hostility. Friendships and pacts are renewed. "The goal of the musem," Rabinow says, "is to bring divine favour not only on individual participants but also on the collectivity" (pp.93-94). This goal is pursued by means of rituals which bring together segments of the tribe for joint participation under the guidance of ritual specialists who represent the saint.

The work of Emanuel Marx (1977) on a related group of people -- the Bedouin of Sinai -- reaches similar conclusions. Like the Berbers, the Bedouin undertake annual pilgrimages to the tombs of saints in their areas. Each tribe has its patron saint whose tomb, Marx concludes, represents tribal territoriality (p.45). The annual reunion around the saint's tomb has the social function of restating group ties, group territoriality, but also more elusive properties of the group. Marx calls these latter "ideologies that are deeply engrained in Bedouin thought," such as agnation, tribal organisation, the saints' cult, the regionalism of south Sinai, the universalism of Islam, etc. (p.47).

The local Muslim pilgrimage has also been found to have cultic associations in sub-Saharan Africa. Among the Wolof of Senegal, the spread of Islam is associated with the work of Amadou Bamba Mbake (1850-1927), who developed his own independent Islamic order called the Muridiyya. The site of Amadou Bamba's tomb has become a focus for this group. Booth (1976:321) writes:

> The followers of Amadou Bamba believe he was directly in touch with God; he may even have been in some sense divine. One of the most impressive mosques in sub-Saharan Africa has been built over his

> grave at Touba. Every good Murid is expected to make a pilgrimage here once a year.

The annual pilgrimages to five holy rock-shrines undertaken by Persian Zoroastrians also have been said to have social-solidifying effects. Boyce (1977:248) states that "pilgrimages were in general a great means of fostering solidarity among the Zoroastrians, with news being exchanged between villages, marriages arranged, and friendships kept in good repair."

(iii) Pilgrimage as an Enactment of the Social Order

Some analysts have found in the rituals of pilgrimage an enactment of aspects of the temporal social order. The place of pilgrimage is a site where people gather to create symbolic reflections of existing social relations among men and, by so doing, to provide these human situations with divine sanction. The perahära, a sacred procession performed at places of pilgrimage in Sri Lanka, described by Obeyesekere (1966:24), is one such ritual:

> The organization of the human personnel marching in the procession reflected in epitome the feudal, social and political structure of the province. The procession was traditionally led by the disāva (governor) of the province, various state officials, the kapurālas (temple priests), and the chief Buddhist monks. The castes were represented in their roles as drummers, dancers, washermen, flutists, smiths and potters...This perahära presents to the assembled crowd the powerful upper hierarchies of not only the pantheon but also the political order, including the major castes of the kingdom, in the 'cultural performance' of their social roles.

Pruess (1974) finds that the monarchy in Thailand received important bolstering by its relationship to the sacred places of Buddhist pilgrimage within the country. In the 19th Century, monarchs alone had the monopoly over the construction of buildings at the shrine sites, and vested administration over them in the hands of court-appointed or -confirmed officials (p.69). There was also an annual royal pilgrimage. Secular rulers were involved in the procurement and especially the enhancement of sacred relics of the Buddha. Pruess asserts that these objects gave a sacred legitimacy to royal power by associating the ruler with the ideal Buddhist king Asoka.

By his annual pilgrimage, the king established "that the territory and its inhabitants were the inheritance of the Buddha and that the ruler of the territory and inhabitants was a meritorious supporter of Buddhism" (p.59). The shrine thus serves as a locus for the symbolic fusion of the territory and people of Thailand with their primary national symbols -- king and religion (p.81). This consolidation reinforces Thai national identity and, in the process, reestablishes the legitimacy of the monarch and monarchy in the context of the nation and of Buddhism.

Political-monarchical significance has also been attributed to the pilgrimage to Mecca. In the late 15th century in the Sudan, a general named Muhammad Ture seized power from the ruling dynasty. Booth (1976:300) gives the following history of the importance of the pilgrimage for his legitimisation of rule:

> Soon after securing power, Muhammad Ture went on the pilgrimage to Mecca, where the Sharif designated him as *khalifa* (deputy) for the 'land of Takrur.' This title, added to the mysterious power associated with those who had made the pilgrimage, provided a new, more distinctively Islamic, basis of authority. The traditional Sudanic 'divine king' was thus replaced by the Muslim 'pilgrim-king'....One could say that the state itself had now become officially Islamic with Islamic symbols of investiture: the tunic, turban and sword given by the sharif of Mecca.

The close association of pilgrimage and the monarchy has been known in India as well. In an analysis of historical relations between the ruler of the state of Orissa and its principal shrine of Jagannātha in Puri, L.K. Mahapatra (1976) finds that the temple and deity were identified with the king, and the kingdom with the god's realm.

A similar situation is found in pilgrimages which reinforce the authority of religious leaders. In a study of Muslim pilgrimages to saints' and martyrs' tombs in Kerala, in South India, Dale and Menon (1978:537) conclude:

> Viewed from the perspective of the principal organisers, the 'ulamā', the nerccas are not merely a religious event but are a reaffirmation of their traditional leadership of Kerala Muslim society.

This function of these festive pilgrimages is reflected in the rituals of the nercca, which revolve around the 'ulamā', and involve obligatory, and sometimes substantial, gifts to them from pilgrim parties.

Pilgrimages can also, however, operate against the established social order. Jusserand (1950:193) notes the crowds of pilgrims who swarmed to the tombs of martyred rebels in England, for "to make a saint of a rebel was the most energetic means of protesting against the king, and the people would not miss the opportunity under some of their sovereigns."

Daniel Gross' research on the Catholic pilgrimage of Bom Jesus de Lapa in Brazil reveals that "in some respects, the relationship between a pilgrim and his saint may be regarded as a 'sacralization' of the earthly patron-client relationship" (1971:145). The ideological system of northeastern Brazil is seen to find support in the structure of behaviour and relationships involved in the pilgrimage. The appropriate behaviour towards earthly benefactors (patrons) by pilgrims (clients) is reinforced by the pilgrimage, which sanctifies aspects of social structure that are fundamental to existing social patterns. Gross concludes that "in its reflection of earthly social structure, the principle ritual of the pilgrimage may be said to encourage conformity with existing social norms" (pp.145-46).

Similar conclusions are drawn by Lello Mazzacane (1976) regarding popular fiestas and pilgrimages in southern Italy. Festivals are linked as symbolic opposites to the ordinary activities of life. Whereas the function of work is production, the main function of festivals is consumption. Mazzacane finds that different social classes participate to different degrees in the various types of annual celebrations: small merchants prefer to take part in "fetes patronales", while peasants tend to participate

in pilgrimages. In summary, this study found that popular cultural performances, including pilgrimages, were "occasions for and modes of symbolic expression of the relations of economic and cultural subordination that prevail in southern Italian society" (p.233). This attempt at a Marxist interpretation of pilgrimage was the only one found.

Dale Eickelman, in another study of Moroccan Islam, echoes some of these conclusions. In zyara (pilgrimages to the tomb of a saint (marabout)), "the inequalities implicit in everyday social relations are preserved during the festival in Boujad", the site of the saint's tomb (1976:173). The central purpose of the pilgrimage to this centre is for tribesmen to renew their dyadic contracts with the descendants of the saint (the Sherqawa). By this covenant the tribesmen honour the saint and his successors, and are guaranteed divine protection in return. But the actual rituals of pilgrimage, "the patterns of participation in these, the arrangement of tents, and the patterns of contributions for collective offerings to Sherqawi marabouts and visitors all reflect the effective social units at that time" (p.172). In sum, "the pilgrimage to Boujad largely constitutes a continuation of the ordinary social order" (p.175).

b. Theories of Individual Motivation

In the three functionalist perspectives discussed above, emphasis falls on the effects of pilgrimage felt in the group or on the life and constitution of the group. But it seems to hold true, even in these cases, that what the pilgrimage holds out to the pilgrim is personal gains, even when the analyst can see, from an objective perspective, that the group or the social order is affected by the collective performances of pilgrimage.

'Umar al-Naqar (1972) has studied the tradition of the hājj in West Africa. The Muslim pilgrimage there, as elsewhere, refers to the obligatory

journey to Mecca. Al-Naqar finds that even in this pilgrimage, which is a foundation of group identity among Muslims, the factors which motivate an individual to undertake the often long and costly journey are rooted in notions of personal duty or, alternatively, personal gain. The latter is not an accepted orthodox motive, but al-Naqar notes "the common Muslim belief in the efficacy of asking God's favour while on pilgrimage" (p.135). He elaborates on this popular belief:

> ...the success of returned pilgrims is solely attributed to the fact that they asked for fulfilment of particular ambitions. Al-Hājj 'Umar, it is said, asked for power; others may ask for wealth or learning ... Some pilgrims collect other peoples' monies with the pretext that while on pilgrimage they were to make a wish on their behalf.
> (al-Naqar 1972:135)

The social distinction which follows on the achievement of the title of al-hāji by those who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca is another personal motive noted by al-Naqar. The title bears with it increased prestige and higher social standing which pilgrims can, in turn, convert into wealth, power, and personal or familial social betterment. That the spiritual benefit of the hājj accrues to the discrete individual is attested to by the fact that some Islamic traditions permit the performance of the pilgrimage by a deputy on behalf of one who has died before completing the obligation.

John Works' study of pilgrims from Hausaland in West Africa also reveals a strong component of personal interest among pilgrims:

> Scholars used it as a form of ideological protest, while larger groups escaped taxes and widespread oppression through religious migration. Even leaders in Sokoto considered a policy of mass migration to the east as an eschatalogical response to the British occupation of Hausaland...In the years that followed, dissatisfaction occasioned by various stimuli impelled others to leave on pilgrimage. A still larger number left Hausaland seeking prestige, adventure, commercial success, or simple fulfilment of a religious obligation.
> (Works 1976:220-21)

Marx (1977) finds the same explicit emphasis on personal motive and reward among the Bedouin pilgrims of the south Sinai. Although the obvious functional analysis which attributes group solidarity to the annual tribal

gathering at the tomb of the saint holds validity, from the standpoint of the participants, the pilgrimage is a time for the forging of personal ties and strengthening existing social relations of a dyadic kind. The participants in these pilgrimages are both pastoralists and gardeners. Some members of the family tend the flocks while others cultivate the land. This arrangement makes families highly interdependent economically, but the division of labour brings about long-term and long-distance separations between the mutually dependent family members. Marx comments:

> While individuals move about a great deal, for much of the year they meet only some of the people on whom they depend for mutual assistance and reassurance. Relationships require maintenance. When persons do not interact regularly, they lose confidence in their relationships. Would it stand the test of a critical situation? Therefore each Bedouin strives to visit his relatives and friends, and the opportunity to see many of them at one time presents itself in late summer.

The late summer season is when the Bedouin are free from agricultural work, and are therefore able to undertake pilgrimages. Marx concludes:

> the commonly shared belief in saints' tombs, and in saints as intercessors with God, is one of the foundations of the tribal pilgrimage. Each of the individuals who participates in the gathering believes that he obtains a spiritual benefit. It must be added, however, that he may also expect material advantages, perhaps meet debtors or offer a car or a camel for sale.
> (Marx 1977:39-41)

Similarly, Vincent Crapanzano's research on the Ḥamadsha of Morocco reveals the personal nature of the pilgrimage:

> The pilgrim goes to the saint's tomb to ask the saint to intercede with God for him. He is anxious to obtain <u>something</u> {original emphasis}: a child, a spouse, business success, a favourable verdict at court, poetic inspiration, the cure of an illness, the alleviation of the symptoms of an attack by a jinn, or simply a change of fortune.
> (Crapanzano 1973:170)

The Muslim pilgrimage is clearly of two types. There is a clear doctrinal distinction drawn between the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca (the <u>hājj</u>) and the journey (<u>ziyāra</u>) to the nearby saint who holds a place within the local cultural, religious and, perhaps, political field. It

would be concise to find a correlation between the hājj and spiritual motivation and the ziyāra and material-seeking among pilgrims, but the studies by al-Naqar and Works show this relationship to be untenable. As elegantly stated by Marx (1977:41): "Bedouin see nothing incongruous in the seeking of spiritual and material benefits at the same time. They do not conceive of purely spiritual or purely material occasions..." It follows from this belief that wealth or other material benefit is a sign of divine favour. By performing acts which increase one's store of spiritual merit, the individual improves his chances of receiving a share of the Lord's bounty. The connexion between cause and effect rests in the divine realm, in that an indirect causal relationship is perceived between religious acts and material gains. The hājj may have prayed for power at Mecca, and a pilgrimage to a local saint will cure a child.

The attribution of causality to ritual acts is characteristic of non-scientific cultures. Pilgrimage has been seen to have functional ramifications for the group or groups practising it, but even in the most obligatory of pilgrimages -- to Mecca -- motivation for personal gain is common. Voluntary pilgrimages in Christian, Buddhist and Hindu traditions also reveal the individualistic nature of pilgrimage.

Sumption's detailed study of medieval Christian pilgrimage presents the argument that a decline in personal piety through the middle ages resulted in the transformation of pilgrimage from a highly spiritual act to one of ritualistic formulism. Whereas in the early period pilgrimage was an allegorical journey in which one repeated the life of Christ, replete with dangers, blessings, pitfalls and guidance, most suitably performed in Jerusalem itself, in the later middle ages, pilgrimage was a perfunctory rite undertaken for the automatic accumulation of thousands of years of indulgences and the absolution of sin, or for cures. The forms

that pilgrimage assumed in the different eras are shown to be determined by the religious system within which pilgrimage occupied a place. The changes in medieval Christianity were reflected in changing pilgrimage practices. Sumption documents at great length the personal motives which were channeled into pilgrimage behaviour by medieval society, beginning with the spiritual quest and ending with the self-flagellating penitent. But whether spiritual or earthly in motive, the pilgrimage tradition explored by Sumption was founded upon the voluntary actions of individuals pursuing culturally defined patterns of action for reasons of personal profit.

Sumption attempts to find a first cause for the practice of medieval pilgrimage and, unfortunately, his excellent socio-historical study concludes with the sentence: "If Christians have at times travelled long distances to venerate the remains of spiritual heroes, then it was because in doing so they satisfied an emotional need" (p.302). To attempt to explain the existence of a complex social and cultural tradition by recourse to human emotions can never be satisfying since humanity and man's needs are so much more universal than any form of behaviour intended to satisfy them. There is no necessity in certain emotions being satisfied by certain performances. Different needs can find the same expression and similar needs a variety of forms. It is also true that the pilgrimage tradition documented in Sumption's book itself indicates that pilgrims' motives were more than merely emotional. Piety, for example, can take the form of attempts to gain a more truthful understanding of the central doctrines of the religion, not just emotional responsiveness. In other words, there are intellectual as well as emotional motivations for pilgrimage. The personal motives of the pilgrims themselves are of a wide variety of types -- some emotional, many otherwise. It is important that the analysis encompass all

varieties of the practice, explaining how these are all satisfied by the form of ritual expression which they are given in that religious tradition. Even if all pilgrim motives could be reduced to emotional needs, we would still be left with the question of why the institution of pilgrimage is chosen to satisfy these needs, and not exile, fasting, recitations, fines, prayers, dances, and so on.

Sumption's study does succeed admirably in two useful ways. First, one finds in his work the important axiom that the institution of pilgrimage is a reflection of the larger religious tradition within the society. The pilgrimage, in all of its aspects as a symbolic, ritual, semantic, ideational and religious institution, images and is continuous with the forces of the society of which it is intimately a part. Secondly, Sumption stresses the personal motivation of pilgrims as an important element of the pilgrimage. Despite his attempts to reduce all motives to a common emotional need, Sumption is perceptive in showing that, in the final analysis, it is individuals who undertake the rigours of pilgrimage and it is by giving attention to their motives and actions that the forces active in society, particularly those forces that are channeled into religious behaviour, are revealed. Journeying to shrines takes on different meanings and forms in different places at different times. The motives and behaviour of the participants themselves are the key to understanding the aspects of the religious system which are expressed in pilgrimage. The sources of these motives and behaviour lie in the social and historical reality of the times, which are, in Sumption's word, "imaged" in the pilgrimage tradition.

Sumption is not alone in giving importance to the ideas of the pilgrims themselves. Walter Starkie's study of the pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James at Compostela in Spain (1965:62) reaches a conclusion similar to

Sumption's: "Pilgrimage in the religious sense of the word appealed instinctively to man."

Nancy Falk's article (1977) on pilgrimage to the shrines of the relics of the Buddha isolates the ritual circumambulation (pradakṣiṇā) of the sacred shrine as a key feature of the pilgrimage. This action, she says, which is an obligatory performance on all pilgrimages to these centres, is symbolic of a journey representing personal spiritual ascent. By pilgrimage to and pradakṣiṇā in the centres of the cult of the traces, the individual undergoes a ritual transformation which takes him, as it were, up the mountain (symbolised in the Buddhist stupa).

The study of Buddhist pilgrimage in Thailand by Pruess discussed above reaches similar conclusions about pilgrimage, although his view of the mechanism by which this goal is accomplished is different from that of Falk. Pruess sees pilgrimage as both a ritual action and, as has been discussed, a social phenomenon. As a ritual, pilgrimage is a means to the accumulation of personal spiritual merit which can be applied to the attainment of happiness and well-being in this life, or to personal salvation in the after-life. Pruess finds that the personal relationship between pilgrim and deity, as expressed in the shrine centre, contains an "element of reciprocity in the ritual performed with regard to a sacred object. The devotee presents offerings and prostrates himself in the expectation that the merit store will be increased and that general well-being...and even specific benefits will result" (p.110). Pruess concludes that, in its essence "Theravada Buddhist pilgrimage...is a recurrent undertaking which brings about an internal alteration in the merit store of the individual pilgrim: (p.206).[1] This change is the ascent up the sacred

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[1]In another Theravada country -- Sri Lanka -- one term for pilgrimage is pin gamana, a 'merit journey' (Gombrich 1971:109-11).

mountain, symbolically expressed in the pradakṣiṇa, the transformation of base man into his spiritual potentiality.

One study of Hinduism which stands out among the many for its suggestion of a similar individualist basis for understanding pilgrimage is Diehl's research on South Indian ritual (1956). This book contains a very detailed study of several south Indian pilgrimage sites, their organisation and ritual structure. Diehl observes that:

> A pilgrimage is among other things a means to an end. The festivals take place according to Agamic rules and local traditions. They have their own meaning, but the pilgrimage, even if it is timed and directed to fit in with a festival, is an affair of the individual. (p.250)

And later;

> A pilgrimage is mostly the result of a vow. Something is wrong, or some danger threatening, or some good things, highly desired, are missing. Again there are other motives for going on pilgrimage originating in a general atmosphere of piety and devotion and communal and social loyalty. But very often the tour to the holy place is undertaken with a definite object in view. (p.255)

In Diehl's view the core of pilgrimage is the journey by the individual to the sacred place in pursuit of some personally desired end.

c. The Theories of Victor Turner

The theories of pilgrimage discussed thus far have all adopted one perspective or another to analyse this complex activity. Concentrating on a limited aspect of the institution, none has attempted to create a theory of pilgrimage applicable to all cases in all societies. One who has tried to create such a grand scheme is Victor Turner.

Turner first published a tentative approach to pilgrimage in 1973. In the article "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal", Turner focuses on the uniformities in the pilgrimage process as he identifies them in every

major historical religion. In this endeavour, he draws heavily upon his earlier writings on ritual and symbolism. Turner sees pilgrimage as a process similar to a tribal rite of passage. The pilgrim sets out from a home community in which he is enmeshed through a myriad of structural bonds, moves out into a state of liminality on the pilgrimage, then returns from this anti-structural state to the home world of structure. The return, however, is at a new level, as the pilgrim has been initiated and hence transformed during the liminal period of his journey. Turner presents a number of selective quotations from a variety of sources to demonstrate that the liminal period of the pilgrimage process is characterised by a particular ethos among the participants, which he labels (drawing on earlier work) 'communitas'. In the pilgrimage situation, he asserts, a social bond develops among the pilgrims which welds them into a group. Relations among group members cross-cut the social divisions which are typical of social order in the home sphere, and hence Turner designates the process of pilgrimage as a form of anti-structure. This is not to say that it is an anarchic and formless mob-consciousness, but that, compared to the highly ordered and structured sedentary life of the place of residence, pilgrimage involves the establishment of a temporary bond of comradeship and quasi-brotherhood among those together en route. In a later article, entitled "Pilgrimage and Communitas" (1974b), Turner elaborates on these ideas. Pilgrimage, he says, is "going from a Familiar place to a Far place, and, in traditional pilgrimage, of then returning, inwardly renewed, to a Familiar one again. The Familiar place is secular, mundane, everyday, ordinary; the Far place is sacred, rare, often miraculous" (ibid:305). Turner summarises the characteristics of communitas as follows:

> a direct, immediate confrontation or 'encounter' between free, equal, levelled, and total human beings, no longer segmentalized into structurally defined roles....It means freedom, too, from class or caste affiliation, of family and lineage membership.
>
> (Turner 1974:307)

The distinction between this absolute communitas and that which one actually observes, Turner says, is that the latter is hemmed in by "the cultural bounds set by each theology and world view" (p.307). Communitas is not the negation of structure, but it is a 'critique' of structure, opposite to it within the bounds of the religious tradition. Pilgrimage offers participants a controlled transformation by the process of taking them out of their familiar world and returning them there after having been cleansed and renewed by the experience (of the "feeling-tone" (p.324)) of communitas in the group of pilgrims.

In his most recent work (with Edith Turner), to which we have already made reference, Turner alters his theory in some measure. Whereas in his earlier work he had called pilgrimage a 'liminal' process, drawing directly on the parallel to a rite of passage, he now alters the term to 'liminoid'. In the introductory chapter to the book, entitled "Pilgrimage as a Liminoid Phenomenon", he distinguishes between the liminal and the liminoid. The distinction seems to rest on the fact that the liminal period of a rite of passage is always initiatory and obligatory, while pilgrimage is voluntary and for a variety of purposes, including the initiatory but for others as well. Turner then constructs a hierarchy based on the liminality-liminoid continuum. Liminality is typical of shrines at the lower end of the scale (the local), while liminoid features are to be found at the upper end (central shrines of the religion).

Turner's theory of pilgrimage can be reduced to two central aspects. Pilgrimage is seen as a process of moving from the familiar to the anti-structural 'other' and back, and the period of being away from structure (the liminal or liminoid period) is characterised by the existence of a communitas-quality of relationship among participants. The former creates

the situation in which the latter can flourish. These factors, Turner asserts, are common and essential to all pilgrimages.

Previous to his writings on pilgrimage in 1978, Turner himself had done little fieldwork on pilgrimage. He had collected other researchers' findings and used these as material for the development of his own theory. Reference to the original courses (e.g., I. Karve 1962) reveals that Turner tended to choose quotations selectively, excluding data that did not fit his theory. Since its publication, Turner's approach to pilgrimage has been put to the test in several fieldwork situations by other analysts, notably Pruess and Eickelman.

Both Pruess (1974) and Eickelman (1976) find that at Thai and Moroccan places of pilgrimage, the process of removing pilgrims from the web of home life and transporting them to a sacred place set apart (liminal) occurs. The content that Turner indicates as essential in this process -- the communitas-type relationships -- is found to be absent, however. After summarising Turner's theory, Eickelman states:

> Many of these features are largely absent from the pilgrimage to Boujad. There is no free co-mingling of pilgrims from different social groups, although, as in traditional markets, there is a suspension of overt hostilities. Each group present has a dyadic tie to the Sherqawa, but this bond does not necessarily create horizontal ties among the groups themselves...As with the hajj, the decision to go to Boujad is made by individuals on an annual basis, although in the latter case there is usually considerable group pressure to participate. Finally, the inequalities implicit in everyday social relations are preserved during the festival in Boujad.
>
> (p.173)

It has been found elsewhere, notably in Obeyesekere's data on Sri Lanka and Gross' on Brazil, that similar maintenance of inequality occurred in the places of pilgrimage. Smith (1970:277) is telling in the same vein on pre-Islamic Arabic pilgrimages:

> Though the great sanctuaries of heathen Arabia were frequented at the pilgrimage feasts by men of different tribes, who met peaceably for a season under the protection of the truce of God, we find that their participation in the worship of the same holy place did not bind alien clans together in any religious unity; they worshipped side by side but not together.

Pruess applied Turner's framework to his own research in some detail. He did not find a contrast between structured social relations of home and the anti-structure of the place of pilgrimage. Rather, people tended to bring structured social bonds with them, as pilgrim groups were often formed on the basis of existing social groups (clubs, schools, etc.).[1] Pilgrims' actions in the place of pilgrimage also reflected their pre-existing bonding. They mixed little with other pilgrims who were not members of their parties. The pilgrimage process in Thailand is very much a part of everyday concerns and ideology, since its definitive feature -- merit-accumulation -- is only intensified in the places of the sacred traces of the Buddha, not exclusive to them. Pruess concludes that there is not evidence of communitas among the Thai pilgrims, and hence that this affective characteristic is not part of the Thai pilgrimage tradition.

The inapplicability of Turner's theories to the data on West Bengal is equally conclusive, as will be discussed in the following section of this chapter. It remains here to look more closely at Turner's work on pilgrimage to discover why it succeeds in part but in part fails. To date, no study of a place of pilgrimage or a pilgrimage tradition by a social scientist has confirmed what Turner has postulated as a universal process of pilgrimage.

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[1]Dale and Menon (1978:525) found a similar situation in Kerala. They report of pilgrim parties to Muslim pilgrimage centres that "...the most important offerings at the nerccas are presented by corporate groups in a highly stylized ritual. Villages, organizations of untouchables, craft guilds, and occupational associations bring their gifts in a series of varavus or 'arrivals'..."

Turner's approach concerns both the structure and the content of pilgrimage. He attempts to isolate factors which are universal denominators in both of these categories. Regarding structure, his theory carries some validity. Pilgrimage can clearly not be equated to a rite of passage, as Turner himself has implicitly acknowledged by his recent shift in terminology from that which describes a rite of passage (liminal) to that which asserts a similarity to a rite of passage (liminoid). It remains true, however, that every instance of pilgrimage must have a journey from home to sacred centre and return to home. The nature of the journey, its motivating factors and the activities to be found in the sacred centre vary greatly from shrine to shrine and pilgrimage to pilgrimage for, as has been noted, pilgrimage mirrors the society and religious tradition in which it is embedded. The journey does transfer an individual from a profane and familiar environment to a sacred place which is spatially separated from surrounding everyday life. In the place of pilgrimage, symbolically (if not actually) the mountain-top (the abode of the deity or his power), the pilgrim interacts with the deity through the medium of symbols and ritual.

Turner's structural considerations of the pilgrimage process apply to all of the published data on pilgrimage. It is unfortunate that he has adopted the terminology of the rite of passage to describe the structure of pilgrimage because there is no necessary parallel between the two processes. Pilgrimage is frequently not initiatory and does not necessarily mark a change in the social status (prestige or station) of the pilgrim. The similarity that exists between these two structures of social behaviour is not clarified by the application of terminology appropriate to one to the other. Considering pilgrimage in its own right, it seems reasonable

to agree with Turner that the journey of pilgrimage is a process of transposition from the profane, mundane sphere to the sanctified, bounded sphere of divinity.

As Turner has used terminology appropriate to the analysis of one social process for the analysis of another, so has he brought forward earlier theories of his own to analyse the content of the pilgrimage process. The contrast between structure and anti-structure developed in The Ritual Process (1969) is applied to pilgrimage, so that the processual and geographical journey is seen almost as a rite of reversal. The form that anti-structure takes, in Turner's view, is the qualitative feature of communitas-bonding among the pilgrims. In the appendix to Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture, communitas is equated with social anti-structure. It has already been elicited from the work of Pruess and Eickelman that, to say the least, the quality of communitas that Turner considers an essential feature of pilgrimage is not universal.[1] Turner here stumbles over the block which created problems for him and others in the establishment of pilgrimage typologies, which is that the substantive content of pilgrimage varies to the extent that religious traditions vary from one another. While the journey to the sacred place occurs in all pilgrimage practices by definition, no single qualitative factor is similarly recurrent. Turner is selective in choosing his quotations to support his contentions regarding pilgrimage and communitas. It seems not unfair, given the contrary evidence to that which he uses, to suggest that Turner has sought to find in pilgrimage a validation of his earlier theoretical propositions on ritual, and in order to do so, has somewhat misrepresented

[1] Even some of the detailed ethnography in the Turners' book (1978) argues against the ubiquity of the communitas-quality in all pilgrimages. St. Patrick's Purgatory, an important Irish pilgrimage studied by the Turners, was traditionally visited by penitential pilgrims who "spent twenty-four hours alone in the penitential cave" (p.125).

the data. No doubt this results from attempting to fit a body of data into a pre-existent framework developed for other purposes. There is a measure of fit and a good deal of squeezing of the balance.

Turner's notion of communitas as an essential feature of pilgrimage can also be criticised for the repetition of the tendency seen elsewhere to reduce the nature of pilgrimage to the satisfaction of emotional needs. Turner draws upon the humanistic psychologist Csikszentmihalyi's theories about the pleasure of playing to explain the persistence of pilgrimage in terms of the emotional satisfaction of the pilgrims. This satisfaction is said to derive from the pleasure of the group communitas experience (the "flow"). The need for penance, the desire to endure suffering or seek salvation or the pursuit of material gains may be the intellectual "triggers" (Turner's term) that motivate a pilgrim, but in the place of pilgrimage itself, the pilgrim merges himself into an enjoyable egoless state of awareness. Turner suggests, in conclusion:

> ...pilgrimage as a cultural form, and particular pilgrimages as historical institutions, have survived so long and in the face of so many countervailing pressures (antireligious and iconoclastic movements), precisely because they provide eminently satisfactory frames for the flow experience, in both the journey to and the exercises at the pilgrimage center.
>
> (Turner and Turner 1978:139)

Turner has suggested a universal quality for the pilgrimage experience, and has attached to this feature great significance as the underlying principle of individual satisfaction on which the popularity of the institution is founded. This position is clearly untenable. First, it has already been noted that communitas-type relations, as described by Turner, are not to be found in every pilgrimage tradition, and so cannot be a feature of the universal characteristics of the institution. It was not found to typify Moroccan or Thai pilgrimages. In the absence of this "egoless flow", why have the pilgrimages in those countries remained

popular? This point suggests a second criticism, that to reduce the factors that are of foremost significance to the pilgrim to the emotional and experiential is to deny the importance of other facets of the human character, such as the intellectual, social and spiritual. Turner has no grounds for asserting that the motivations and satisfactions from these other aspects of man's nature are secondary to the emotional. This criticism is corroborated by the fact that the type of emotional response suggested by Turner is not found everywhere, therefore other factors must be involved in at least some cases of pilgrimage. Finally, as was said earlier in relation to Sumption's work, analyses of social institutions which see a first cause in emotional satisfaction do not account for the form of the institution under review, since the same satisfaction could be derived from a variety of other forms of behaviour. While some individuals may emerge renewed and initiated as a result of the experience of "the flow" of a pilgrimage centre, this fact does not tell anything about 'why pilgrimage'? It is exactly because this emotional satisfaction is not specific to pilgrimage, and so can tell us little about that institution, that Turner himself can find 'pilgrimages' in visits to the sites of the 1776 American Revolution, national parks, beaches, Lenin's Tomb and American Protestant Revivalist meetings. These places are obviously of very different types. That they can be discussed together indicates that the common factor among them is clearly one of low denominator. That this factor (communitas) is not even to be found universally in pilgrimage practices makes it a very dubious theoretical proposition to explain pilgrimage. Turner compares a crowd of pilgrims with a crowd at the seaside, saying that both are seeking "an almost sacred, often symbolic, mode of communitas" (1978:20). To ignore the differentiating motives of the participants to this extent is to suggest

that, suntans or salvation, it makes no difference. The ideas, beliefs and motives of individuals in social groups are as fundamental to the institutions of society as the processual structures within which they occur. Turner lays emphasis on patterns of action and neglects patterns of thought and belief, to the extent of creating unbalanced analyses.

d. Testing the Theoretical Hypotheses

The literature concerning the sociology of pilgrimage contains a variety of perspectives that can be applied to the institution. To a certain extent, the variety of analyses reflects the variety of forms pilgrimage takes. It is for this reason that a functional analysis may be very applicable as explanatory in certain situations or cases, but not others. The content associated with a pilgrimage tradition may vary greatly from that of another pilgrimage tradition. Accordingly, the uses to which the institution is put will vary. Turner's attempts at a universally applicable analysis have been the most free of these limitations, but have suffered from others. It remains to apply these theoretical perspectives to the Bengali data in order to isolate the most illuminating of the analytical concepts, and perhaps develop others. The hypotheses to be tested are:

(i) pilgrimage places are centres for the diffusion of the 'great tradition',

(ii) pilgrimage places can be ranked hierarchically, with a correspondence at higher-level shrines to spirituality and lower-level shrines to material instrumentality,

(iii) pilgrimage traditions function to integrate, reinforce, or reproduce social relations among participants, and

(iv) pilgrimages are anti-structural rituals characterised by the existence of communitas-type relations among the pilgrims.

(i) Pilgrimage and the Great Tradition

Arguing against this hypothesis perhaps lends too much credence to the theory. Nevertheless, reference to the data collected in West Bengal will accurately demonstrate the utility or inutility of the concepts of the "great" and "little" traditions, particularly with reference to pilgrimage.

Tarkeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith are centres in networks of population circulation and religious behaviour. Were these centres to be loci for the diffusion of one type or variant of a culture within the population, it would be expectable that there would be discernible differences in belief, practice and ideology between that found in the centre and that current elsewhere. Such is not here the case. The religious culture of each of the three centres is not highly differentiated from the commonly held traditions of Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism throughout West Bengal. The central focal deities and their images, the mythologies and belief systems woven around these, rituals practised and sacred calendars observed, were not found to be different in type from those typical of the cults of Bengali Hinduism which dominated each of the sites. The sacred centre of pilgrimage is differentiated from the religious culture of its surrounding region by degree rather than type. There is no evidence for the case that the Hinduism of the pilgrimage centre is more orthodox, Sanskritic or textual than that available in the non-pilgrimage religious traditions of the cults of Bengali Hinduism.

The patterns of belief and practice encountered in Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith can be traced to origins in a variety of sources. The influence of the Vedas, Upaniṣads and Tantras is mingled with traditions drawn from folk cults, autochthonous deity worship and regional belief patterns. The religious structure of the pilgrimage centre is a reflection of the regional

religious system, and as the latter contains elements drawn from many orthodox and heterodox sources, so are these reflected in the culture prevalent in the sacred place. The pilgrimage centre is therefore not simply a repository of the religious patterns of orthodoxy, or the "great" tradition. Several examples will illustrate the fact that, when viewed synchronically, the pilgrimage place is the stage for religious performances which draw upon elements of Bengali culture that can be considered representative of both the so-called "great" and "little" traditions.

Looking first at Tarakeswar, one is struck by the significance of orthodox, Śaṅkarite religious influence in that centre. The maṭha under the mahanta is actively engaged in the popagation of a learned and Vedic version of Hinduism. The chief priest of the temple is a paṇḍit, a member of the paṇḍits' association and well-known for his oratory and public ritual performances. Schools and academies for the teaching of Sanskrit, grammar, poetics and ritual are operated by the maṭha. These attributes all fall at the "great" tradition end of the scale. Yet, in the religious tradition of Tarakeswar, there is much that is not so easily categorised. Traditionally, the most important festival of the town is the Gajan, a typically Bengali folk celebration not sanctioned in any of the ancient texts. Formerly, the culminating act of the Gajan was the Caḍak, when the public performance of self-mutilation (hanging from a pole by hooks through the muscles of the back) took place. While the orthodox practices of the Śivarātri night are practised in Tarakeswar in the same manner as in every Śiva temple, the Gajan is not orthodox Śaiva practice. The origin of the Gajan of Śiva has been most conclusively attributed to the Gajan of Dharma, a god widely worshipped throughout Bengal as a regional cult deity. (Chattopadhyay (1942) and Bhattacharyya (1952)). How is one to

understand the role of the pilgrimage place as a centre of "great" tradition practices when, despite being a place of Sanskritic education and culture and Śaṅkarite philosophy, the festival of a local folk deity has been incorporated as the most popular festival, complete with unorthodox practices? A second similar example from Tarakeswar is the practice of dharnā, which is not a feature of the general conventions of Śaiva worship or ritual.

The difficulty of isolating what exactly constitutes the "great" tradition is perhaps clearest in the case of Navadvip. The doctrines of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas assert a divine hierarchy which is not conventional for all-India Vaiṣṇavism, i.e., they assert that the supreme deity is Kṛṣṇa. In most other Vaiṣṇava traditions the paramount deity is Visnu, of whom Kṛṣṇa is one avatāra. The orthodoxy of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, for which Navadvip is the centre, is not the orthodoxy of Vaiṣṇavism more typical elsewhere in India. Since the lesser shrines of Bengal, the branches of the maṭhas with headquarters in Navadvip and the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava community in general all look to Navadvip as the heavenly Vṛndāvana, and the centre of their cult, it is quite unclear whether the religious tradition enshrined in Navadvip is to be considered of the "great" or the "little" variety.

The doctrinal character of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava cult also reveals the pilgrimage centre to be other than a centre for cultural diffusion. Accepted models of religious behaviour of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas stress that the worshipper of Kṛṣṇa is to be a pure and loving devotee. He must practise behaviour appropriate to this role. It is these practices, learned from a guru, that the individual must observe, whether in a pilgrimage centre, at home or elsewhere. For most pilgrims, the place of pilgrimage is an arena for the acting out of devotional ideals which are meant to permeate all aspects of the devotee's life, only perhaps here in a more rigorous or intensified form.

While a minority of pilgrims may learn the basic truths of the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, previously unknown to them, from the religious discourses and reading of sacred texts that do take place in Navadvip, the kīrtana, prostration, circumambulation (of temple and town) and offering practices that are the most common are the rituals of the already initiated.

Similarly at Tarapith, elements of Hinduism derived directly from orthodox Sanskrit-language sources (e.g., pūjā-mantras) coexist with more esoteric, less mainstream practices (e.g., 'left-handed' Tantrism) and folk cultural traditions, in some measure. When these are taken together, the religious culture of Tarapith cannot validly be assigned to either the "great" or the "little" traditions. If one were to accept membership in the group of Śākta pīṭhas as a feature of "great" tradition status, deriving from ancient written sources based in orthodox mythology, Tarapith would still not fit easily into either "great" or "little" tradition categories because its status as a mahā-pīṭha is disputable, although its importance as a pilgrimage centre is not.

The concept and the function of the place of pilgrimage as a centre for diffusion of one variety of religious tradition to people possessing another is questionable. In general, the instrumental nature of Bengali pilgrimage further argues against this hypothesis. Religious performances concerning pilgrims in the pilgrimage centre most commonly take the form of a pilgrim hiring a specialist to perform rituals on his behalf. The rituals are formal and formulaic; the relationship between priest and pilgrim is generally limited and contractual. The performances are conventional procedures for the accomplishment of a specific end. The structure of events only incidentally teaches the pilgrim about orthodoxy, if at all, as he is subject to little direct participation in ritual, and is seldom in a didactic situation. The Redfieldian model carries the implication that the pilgrimage centre functions to bring about changes in cultural beliefs and patterns among participants. It seems more accurate in the case of West Bengal to say that the personal

beliefs and ideas which initially motivated an individual's pilgrimage may undergo transformation by degree rather than type due to participation in the intensified religious environment of the place of pilgrimage.

The principal argument against the application of bipartite cultural categories to the West Bengali data is that this division of culture distorts the multi-stranded tradition in any single place of pilgrimage. It becomes difficult to label the religious tradition of the pilgrimage centre as being of one type when, in fact, just as the wider religious tradition of the region, the pilgrimage has drawn inspiration and influence from a variety of sources and traditions.

It has been suggested earlier that the pilgrimage, rather than being representative of any single strand of religious culture, is more accurately depicted as a reflection of the religious culture and traditions surrounding it. As the religious tradition (or its part in a cult) is an interwoven dynamic process drawing elements from texts, folk traditions, other religions, syncretic beliefs, etc., so will these elements be given form in the pilgrimage. This perspective allows for the variant complexities of culture and tradition, localism and universality discernible in every pilgrimage, and suggests that these are best understood in terms of the wider patterns of religion in the region. The differences between the religious system evident in the place of pilgrimage and the patterns of belief and practice current among the populace who visit it is not one of different traditions or types but of religiosity and degrees. The model of the "great" and "little" traditions is too simplistically binary to represent patterns of religion observed in West Bengal.

(ii) Hierarchical Correspondences

It can be categorically stated at the outset that the pilgrimage places

of West Bengal defy all attempts at ranking. A number of different standards of sacredness can be applied to the data, and the divergent results, shown as different hierarchies, reveal the impossibility of arriving at a simple, universally acceptable hierarchy.

When the pilgrimage centres of West Bengal are ranked according to the occurrence of place-names in ancient texts, or by the mean distance travelled by pilgrims visiting the shrine (one criterion used by Bhardwaj), Gaṅga-sāgara-saṅgama is the premier shrine of Bengal. In fact, this centre is visited by large numbers of pilgrims at only one annual festival. It is not the place most pilgrims choose for their pilgrimages. Sacred texts do not provide a suitable standard for the ranking of sacred places in Bengal because few of the currently popular pilgrimages are mentioned therein.

The most visited place of pilgrimage in West Bengal is probably the Kalighat temple in Calcutta. Next is Daksineswar north of Calcutta, followed by nearby Tarakeswar. These facts however, reveal little about Bengali perceptions of the sacredness of shrines. Kalighat's patronage is drawn almost exclusively from the heavily-populated city in which it finds itself. Accessibility, quality of transportation and distance from centres of population affect the pilgrim traffic without necessarily reflecting perceptions of relative sacredness.

The factor which most confounds efforts at establishing a ranking of sacred places is the fact that different centres are the most revered among different segments of the population. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas hold Vṛndāvana, in Uttar Pradesh state, to be the holiest place of pilgrimage. Bengali Śaivas rank Benares as the tīrtharāja (king of the pilgrimage centres). The most revered of the Śākta pīṭhas is generally held to be that of Kamakhya in Assam, where the yoni (vulva) of Satī is supposed to have fallen. Within Bengal, the acknowledgement given by Śaivas to Tarakeswar, Vaiṣṇavas to Navadvip and Śāktas to a number of shrines makes a ranking agreeable to all three communities

an impossibility. Because sacredness is not an inherent characteristic of a place, but rather a feature of popular belief about a place, it is a matter of subjective opinion. The cultic pattern of Hinduism in West Bengal creates diversity in popular perceptions of the relative status of holy places, as each cult champions its own revered site over those of its rivals. There is no standard by which the relative holiness of Tarakeswar or Navadvip can be compared since they are, to some extent, parts of separate sub-systems of Hinduism. No hierarchical ordering of sacred shrines can reflect the perceptions of all major segments of the West Bengali population because of this unreconciled diversity.

In all three of the West Bengali pilgrimages studied, the pilgrim's journey takes him to a shrine where, with the help of ritual specialists, he approaches the deity. The particular reasons for pilgrimage found during fieldwork in West Bengal were almost as numerous as the pilgrims themselves. For every reason from getting more hair to expiating the great sin of killing a cow to gaining Tantric powers to simple love of Kṛṣṇa, people left their homes to journey to sacred places. In general, the reasons for practising pilgrimages were of two types: that performed in order to get a material benefit from the deity, and that based on simple devotion or the accumulation of spiritual merit. Another way of phrasing these two categories is benefit in this life as opposed to betterment in the next. However, the popular theological doctrines regarding merit and the love of Kṛṣṇa which characterise the ultimate goals of pilgrims pursuing an improved saṁsāric condition show these motives to share the most important features of pilgrimage for material gain. In both cases, the avowed purpose of pilgrimage is to bring about future beneficial change in the life of the pilgrim or those close to him.

Bhardwaj (1973) makes a case for linking the social characteristics of

pilgrims, notably caste, with the level of a sacred place in a ranking. He states that "there is some justification for the hypothesis that the higher the level of the sacred place the greater is the tendency of high castes to make pilgrimage to it" (1973:186). He associates high caste status, level of sacred place and a tendency of pilgrims to pursue merit rather than gain. Pilgrimage for specific gain is part of a second pattern associated with low caste pilgrims and low level of sacred place. It can be clearly stated that these associations do not hold true for the West Bengali data. The highest percentage of Brāhmaṇ pilgrims was found in what was, by Bhardwaj's criteria, a low-level, subregional shrine (Tarapith). The regional shrine of Navadvip had a higher proportion of lower caste pilgrims. There are reasons for both these inversions. The ascendancy of the Śākta cult in Bengal makes a Śākta pīṭha a favoured place of pilgrimage for the religious mainstream, which is dominated by Brāhmaṇs. The somewhat caste-repudiating traditions among the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas account for the higher number of low caste pilgrims to Navadvip. Bhardwaj's attempts to link the motives of pilgrimage with the social characteristics of the pilgrims and the imputed rank of the place gives too generalised an importance to his limited findings. The inverse situation in Bengal points to the fact that the regional sub-cultural patterns of India stringently limit the possibility of developing fixed typologies based upon groups of characteristics. For example, Bhardwaj asserts that lower caste pilgrims frequent lower-level goddess shrines because of blood sacrifices held there. In Bengal, we find blood sacrifices and lower-level shrines associated with higher caste pilgrims because of the ascendancy of Śāktism in Bengal. One may, indeed, be able to find general correlations between ascribed social characteristics and pilgrimage behaviour in a region, but the unlikelihood of constancy of these correlations across India's many regions makes this data an insubstantial basis for

generalising. The acknowledged sub-cultural variation which has produced India's diversity cannot at the same time exist on the level of social structure where one finds unity.

The second point to be derived here from Bhardwaj's study is his differentiation of the merit and specific-gain patterns of pilgrimage. The implication of this division of pilgrimage motives is that the two patterns are, in fact, separable. This distinction is tenable to some extent on the level of explicit motives, but when one examines the beliefs regarding the mechanism of wish-fulfilment in pilgrimage, the differences between the two sorts of pilgrimage are insubstantial. All pilgrimage is merit-producing; it is only that different pilgrims choose to direct that merit to different ends. There are no significant ritual distinctions between pilgrimage intended to increase the store of spiritual merit and pilgrimage for material change in West Bengal. The underlying structure of pilgrim behaviour is to approach the deity in accord with the formulas of worship for that deity, regardless of whether the merit accumulated by correct performances is to be applied immediately or stored. This fact argues against the designation of the spiritual/material division as two patterns. For most pilgrims, the concept of merit is diffuse and concerns the determination of both earthly and heavenly rewards. The distinctions between the two are not sufficiently clear to justify so strong a separation as Bhardwaj makes. Furthermore, as Emanuel Marx (1977) has noted regarding the Bedouin pilgrims of the Sinai, the difference between the material and the spiritual that might strike a scientific materialist eye does not appear so distinctive to the Bengali Hindu. A worldview that ascribes unlimited power to omnipresent universal deities sees the same agency involved in the arrangement of a more satisfactory future, in this life or the next. Actions in the present are judged by the deities and

converted into the dominant factors of one's future, in both its material and spiritual components.

Having disputed the exaggerated distinction between pilgrimage for merit or gain drawn by Bhardwaj, the process of pilgrimage comes to approximate more closely to what Diehl (1956) has identified as the 'instrumentality' of ritual. While pilgrims may choose to approach certain shrines and deities with certain needs, and others for different purposes, what is common to all is the instrumental function of the activity. This aspect of pilgrimage takes precedence over other functions frequently associated with ritual, such as the expressive or communicative. Pilgrims to Tarakeswar seeking cures, to Navadvip wishing to end their days in the company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, or to Tarapith in want of the protection of the Mother, are all performing meritorious actions intended to move unseen forces for the sake of their futures.

It can be concluded that diversity within the Hindu community in West Bengal makes the task of ranking places of pilgrimage by popular perception of sacredness impossible. The association of certain socio-cultural characteristics with levels of shrine has also been found to be different in Bengal from the pattern proposed by Bhardwaj. To make the divergence of the West Bengali situation from Bhardwaj's model even clearer, note the following differences: whereas Bhardwaj proposes that shrines drawing pilgrims from the farthest distances will have merit-accumulation as the principal motive of pilgrimage, the shrine in West Bengal found to draw pilgrims from the greatest distance (Tarakeswar) is widely renowned for the solution of material problems; contrary to Bhardwaj's association of long-distance patronage and high caste status, Tarapith, with the most restricted draw-area of the three West Bengali places of pilgrimage, has the highest proportion of Brāhmaṇs; inversely, in Navadvip, where the motives for pilgrimage

are more of the merit than the specific type, the proportion of high caste pilgrims is the lowest. It must be concluded that the ranking of shrines and the association of an aggregation of traits with each rank is not a fruitful approach to the study of an institution with as much internal variation as pilgrimage. The study involves cross-cultural comparison, and aspects of culture are too variable a basis for that comparison.

(iii) The Functions of Pilgrimage

The functional approaches to pilgrimage that are quite common in the literature have at best marginal explanatory value for the West Bengali material. In an earlier section, the functional analyses of pilgrimage were found to be of three types: those that considered pilgrimage to be socially integrative; those finding that pilgrimage enhanced group cohesion among the pilgrims themselves; and those that found in pilgrimage a representation of the ordered relations of secular social life.

The latter two perspectives for analysis can be discounted quite easily as bases for the understanding of West Bengali pilgrimage. Pilgrimage in West Bengal is not a group ritual. It is most commonly performed by small groups of closely-related individuals. Ritual performances in the pilgrimage centres focus upon the individual in consort with the deity. There are few performances that produce any element of group solidarity.

A seeming exception to this generalisation is the kīrtana singing and dancing of Vaiṣṇavas in Navadvip. Two or three hours into the performance, the group has indeed been welded into a solidary body in devotion. But even here, the emphasis impressed upon each participant is on his own personal love for and devotion to Kṛṣṇa or Caitanya. Although the group functions together in ritual, it does so only to heighten the emotional involvement of each individual in his own relations with the deity. The experience of rasa

remains intensely personal. Furthermore, since the majority of pilgrims to Navadvip do not go on pilgrimage with a kīrtana group or even participate in a kīrtana in the sacred centre, this hypothetical explanation for the institution is insufficiently broad, even in the case of Navadvip.

The argument against the second functionalist proposition extends to the third as well. Pilgrimage in West Bengal is very much a religious performance of the individual, in which the individual approaches the deity for some instrumental purpose. In all of the festivals and ritual performances, only two were found to embody aspects of secular social relations. The mūla sannyāsis of the Tarakeswar Gajan were drawn from the family of the man who was the rāja of the area at the time of the founding of the temple; and in the mahōtsava of Tārā pūjā, the local zamīndārs and wealthy families sacrificed goats in the temple according to a fixed order. Both these events indicate the historical connections of the temple with its royal and landed patrons, but in the full constellation of rituals and performances, are of extremely limited significance. Since the land of all temples has been confiscated by the Indian government, the recognition of former patrons is more a residual acknowledgement of historical events than a representation or sanctification of existing social relations.

That pilgrimages function to bring about some form of social integration within the region served by the pilgrim centre seems valid. Pilgrims from many parts of West Bengal travel across their state to pilgrimage shrines where they mix almost exclusively with other Bengalis. The fundamental unity of Bengal would be evident to them in the similarity of all other pilgrims to themselves. But the integrative function of pilgrimage is a very difficult factor to isolate. First, there are no measures of the effectiveness of the place of pilgrimage in wielding any sort of group identity or cohesion. The most that can be said with conviction is that the shrine centre is an arena

for group interaction. Secondly, since the social categories of Bengalis who participate in pilgrimage are limited (by religion and caste, but also to a certain extent by place of domicile and class), it is not all of Bengal that is represented in the pilgrimage centre. Muslims, tribals and untouchables are almost totally absent. The Bengal into which the individual might feel integrated by his pilgrimage is the social stratum made up of ritually and economically higher status groups. To the degree that some social groups are excluded from the pilgrimage, to that degree does pilgrimage not function to cross-cut group boundaries to bring about regional social integration.

In any case, the social integrative function of pilgrimage in West Bengal is a latent function. It does not go far to explain the full nature of the institution. Since no one seems to go on pilgrimage in order to feel a part of Bengal, yet they are undertaking their journey voluntarily, pilgrimage must involve factors of motivation and belief not accounted for by these latent functions.

(iv) Anti-structure and Communitas

There is difficulty in applying Victor Turner's theories of pilgrimage to the data from West Bengal. The 'communitas' feeling that Turner has identified and which he suggests as the factor that accounts for the pilgrim's satisfaction on pilgrimage and for the persistent popularity of the institution is not a consistent aspect of Bengali pilgrimage practices. Most pilgrims in West Bengal travel to and from the shrine centre in the company of close family or neighbours. Their stay in the place of pilgrimage is invariably short, and mixing with pilgrims outside their group is actively avoided. It is usual to see a small knot of pilgrims, each with an iron grasp on the one before and behind, forcing their way as a unit through the alien crowd. The pilgrimage situation is not one in which the structural bonds of the home community are sundered by a joyful, levelled communitas relationship among the

participants.

One instance which seems to have many of the requisite characteristics for the situation proposed by Turner is the Tarakeswar Gajan. Pilgrims of many castes participate as equals in a ritual event. They wear a specified uniform that destroys all usual traits of social standing. They give up membership in ascribed social categories by joining the gotra of Śiva. There are no restrictions of age or sex. Nevertheless, on questioning, it was found that the motives for pilgrimage were personal, usually related to individual health. The austerities of the pilgrimage are part of a personal entreaty to the deity, comparable to the practices of the dharnā-jātris. Furthermore, situations in which the temporary elimination of conventional social characteristics would have been most put to the test are avoided in the Gajan. While caste is considered irrelevant in theory, pilgrims prepare and eat their food separately, thus avoiding a situation in which food pollution rules would be applicable. While something of the feeling suggested by Turner does exist among Gajan sannyāsis, this quality is only a tiny and arguably incidental part of the festival. Its existence does not account for the various levels of behaviour and meaning involved in the Gajan. The feeling among the pilgrims is of much less significance to them than their explicit motives of genuinely hoping for cures; its existence does not explain the structured avoidances of the festival traditions (which communitas would ideally nullify).

Something like the communitas quality described by Turner was also to be found in the kīrtana performances of Navadvip. But, as in the Gajan, the emotional feeling among participants which typifies the group is only a part of what the institutional performance means to the participants. The Tarakeswar Gajan is a ritual of asceticism and devotion that cannot be understood without attention to these areas of Hindu belief and practice.

Similarly, the kīrtana is only understandable as a feature of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava bhakti cult. Parallel to the emotional bonding of the moment are intellectual and spiritual components that are equally real, and perhaps of greater significance in the ritual, than the one factor arbitrarily elevated by Turner.

Turner also indicates the significance of the anti-structural movement by the pilgrim from a Familiar place to a Far place and back to a Familiar place. In his theory, he ties this aspect of pilgrimage to the communitas pattern. The West Bengali cases, as those in Thailand and Morocco, do not support Turner's assertion regarding communitas. However, dissociating the two parts of his theory from one another, the anti-structural journey can be discussed independent of communitas.

The Bengali pilgrim does perform a journey from home to shrine and back. In so doing, he does not totally divorce himself from his social structural roles and relationships. Most often, his pilgrimage is undertaken with members of his own or neighbouring households. Group pilgrimages were found to be organised by staff associations, schools, clubs and religious associations. The everyday bonds of social life carry over to the pilgrimage.

On the other hand, Bengali pilgrimage is very much a movement from the secular to the sacred and then returning to the secular. The place of pilgrimage is set off in some measure of isolation from both the centres of population and the surrounding secular locale. The pilgrim moves out and away from his own mundane life, crosses territory, then enters a sacred zone where he interacts with the deity. While it does not clarify the situation to link these two poles as opposed 'structure' and 'anti-structure,' there is clearly a movement away from the familiar place to a place which is sacred, an abode of the deity and hence suited to the purposes of pilgrimage.

The focus that Turner brings to this "liminoid" component of pilgrimage is confounded by his tendency to see the journey as part of a rite of passage-like process. His later adjustments to the theory do not go far enough to remove the shadow of van Gennep's theory from pilgrimage. It may be more illuminating simply to point to the fact that the necessity of the journey of pilgrimage arises because of the importance of separateness to sacredness, rather than because the stage of journeying is initiatory.

In conclusion, the sociological perspectives on pilgrimage to be found in the literature do not provide satisfactory models for the analysis of the Bengali pilgrimage tradition. The theories are somewhat applicable in certain areas, but none of them fully illuminates the essential features and structures at the core of the institution. The argument developed in the next chapter will endeavour to profit from previous attempts at analysing pilgrimage, especially from the flaws of these theories. It will, in addition, draw upon closer analysis of the West Bengali ethnographic data, especially in the light of the literary traditions of pilgrimage in the Hindu sacred texts, in order to suggest a more satisfactory explanatory model than those already examined.



Navadvip: a Goswamy and his

Caitanya-Viṣṇupriyā shrine

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS

In Chapters I and VIII the various perspectives used by different authors to analyse pilgrimage, ranging from mystical beliefs to functional analyses, have been discussed. The wide variety of analytical perspectives on pilgrimage is a comment on the nature of the institution itself: as an act performed by individuals and groups, who travel across territorial tracts to participate in various sorts of rituals celebrated at sites of importance to cult, religion, culture and nation, pilgrimage has many dimensions which can be fruitfully approached from widely divergent perspectives. The studies by Bhardwaj and Sopher have concentrated on the movement of people. Turner and again Bhardwaj have sought to categorise types of shrines and pilgrimages. Vidyarthi and others, including Srinivas, have been concerned with the cultural impact of pilgrimage. Sumption and Eliade have discussed psychological aspects of pilgrimage practice. Each of these perspectives is interesting and offers scope for exploring the many planes and elements of pilgrimage. Each theory has some applicability to the West Bengali data, but each has its own drawback in the search for the defining and essential patterns at the core of the Bengali Hindu pilgrimage tradition. In this chapter, I will argue that the only two universally recurrent features of pilgrimage practice -- sacred places and the journey -- are most fruitfully analysed in terms of the *meaning* of

each within the wider Hindu religious tradition. It is only by discovering the meaning of the common elements of pilgrimage practice that we can fully comprehend why Bengalis undertake this voluntary act and what is the relationship of pilgrimage to encompassing systems of Hindu thought and belief.

a. Pilgrimage and Meaning[1]

Pilgrimage in West Bengal is a voluntary act. There is no disputing that its performance has geographic, demographic, sociological, economic and political implications, but the continuing existence of the institution rests on the choice of individuals to undertake journeys to sacred shrines. To understand why they make this choice and what it means to them, we must look at their explicit motives and beliefs.

At another level, the explicit understandings of the pilgrim are not so significant. Having chosen to make pilgrimage because of beliefs, the pilgrim performs acts which take shape and meaning within overarching patterns of Hindu religious thought. The pilgrim may be totally unaware of the larger frameworks within which his actions are structured. Nevertheless, regardless of the pilgrim's awareness, pilgrimage makes sense in terms of formal Hindu religious ideology.

There are thus two sorts of meaning that give character to pilgrimage as observed in West Bengal. At the level of participant awareness, there is an explicit meaning which explains the individual's understanding of the

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[1] This discussion owes inspiration to the work of Mary Douglas, especially her book Implicit Meanings (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975). The idea of a metaphysical cosmological scheme which is an abstract whole and is yet implicit within more accessible layers of meaning is especially applicable to Hinduism, with its obvious differences between literary, systematic theology and popular, fragmentary behaviour. Observing that pilgrimage is an important institution in both common behaviour and exalted sacred text in Hinduism, the method of implicit/explicit analysis of meaning approaches the difficult question to be faced in this chapter: "how related channels of communication agree so well that they tend to deliver the same message each in its different way" (ibid:8).

behaviour we observe. At the level of social and cultural collectivity, meaning concerns the social construction of reality, within which explicit meanings make sense. These two levels are clearly distinguishable. Explicit meaning is operational and conscious, being how individuals understand their own actions. The implicit ideology is constructed on the metaphysical plane. It is not because the implicit ideology can be traced to sacred texts that it is distinguishable as a separate level of meaning. The elements of the pilgrimage ideology are not exclusive to the texts, although they are given detailed expression therein. It is rather that the concepts which define the parameters of any Hindu practice -- the overarching cosmological, eschatological, teleological and other such bases of the religion -- evidently contribute to the meaning of pilgrimage practice, but not generally at the level of conscious thought. The ideology of pilgrimage is the metaphysical framework by which conscious beliefs and practices are integrated into encompassing systems of Hindu religious thought. The implicit ideology derives from the general fund of Hindu metaphysical concepts but is seldom consciously expressed in the ideas most pilgrims hold regarding their pilgrimage. The actions of the pilgrims, however, are structured by these fundamental concepts.

Despite the recognisable differences between explicit meanings and implicit ideology, the two are linked. The pilgrimage ideology can be identified as a level of meaning implicit within explicit understandings, and the wider, metaphysical ideas are contained within expressed notions. At both levels, in fact, we are tracing expressions of conventional Hindu religious ideas, being expressed through the use of different modes of formulation and communication.

A word on methodology is in order here, as the pursuit of meaning of these sorts is problematic. An anthropologist has fieldwork data,

which presents ample material to discuss explicit meanings. But forays into implicit, metaphysical meanings are fraught with danger. The wider Hindu cosmology and theology that is an important (if seldom expressed) aspect of the pilgrimage tradition is an insubstantial, often contradictory, enigmatic mass of ideas codified in disparate written sources composed through several millenia. The complexity and intractability of the full Hindu religious tradition bear on this problem. The anthropologist concerned with the meaning of behaviour finds himself repeatedly drawn into generalisations that are difficult to establish conclusively and are often susceptible to contradiction from other traditional sources. Nevertheless, foray we must, for it is only in relation to more general patterns of the Hindu religious tradition that the journey and practices of the individual pilgrim in the sacred place make sense. I seek to interpret my fieldwork data by relating it to encompassing systems of belief; I do not intend that the ideology of pilgrimage discussed below be taken as a concrete system of ideas applicable in every case of Hindu pilgrimage. It is not an abstract theory which is the template for all practice. It is rather that the fieldwork data in hand displays elements obviously consonant with Hindu theology, philosophy, cosmology, etc., which cannot be ignored. Interpretation of the meaning of the fieldwork data demands attention to the encompassing systems of culture and society. My intention here is more methodological than typological: I aim to demonstrate that a social institution and instances of realisation of that institution are fully comprehensible only when interpreted in terms of ideas embodied in wider socio-cultural traditions. This exercise is intended to reveal the consonance between metaphysical systematisations and observable events, both of which express socially constructed views on man, the world, the universe

and the cosmos, only at different levels of abstraction.

It is tempting, and perhaps to some extent valid, to conceive of the implicit and explicit levels of meaning in pilgrimage as hierarchically ranked. To do so, however, obscures the more interesting fact that both levels, whatever their relationship to each other, are saying essentially the same thing. It obfuscates the mutual relationship between the different sorts of systematisations of Hindu thought to think of one level as 'higher' than another, whether the higher be 'Sanskritic', 'The Great Tradition', 'The Literate Tradition' or whatever. Different ways of expressing fundamental motifs of Hindu thought are relevant in different contexts; this does not imply that one form is higher than another or, more importantly, that one form is derived from the other. As Dumont and Pocock (1959:45) point out in a discussion of Sanskritization:

> If there is some homogeneity between popular practice and literary disquisitions then...'sanskritization' does not consist in the imposition of a different system upon an old one, but in the acceptance of a more distinguished or prestigious way of saying the same things.

The systematic behaviour of pilgrimage contains ideas that are characteristic of all levels of Hindu thought.

b. Explicit Meaning

Pilgrimage, as conceived by participants, has been discussed at some length in the ethnographic sections of this thesis. I will reiterate briefly in order to formulate the explicit systematisation of ideas to be found at this level.

Pilgrims in West Bengal go on pilgrimage for every imaginable reason. For whatever reasons a Hindu turns to religious practice, for these reasons are pilgrimages made. The motives of devotion, supplication, to gain earthly comforts, the alleviation of suffering or a desirable result, or to gain spiritual rewards, are certainly not unique to pilgrimage. In fact, as has

been argued in earlier chapters and as Jonathan Sumption has demonstrated for medieval Christianity, the content of pilgrimage practice is a reflection of the religious culture of the group from which pilgrims are drawn. This relationship is to be seen not only in the motives of pilgrims, but in the rituals, deities, architecture, symbols, myths and beliefs associated with pilgrimage. Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith are partial social systems, well-integrated into the wider cults of Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism to which they belong. Almost all the observable content of practice in these three centres is not unique to them, but is part of wider religious traditions. Only two elements -- sacred places and the journey -- are consistent aspects of all pilgrimage practice, recurring in every instance of this immensely variable institution and differentiating it from other forms of religious activity.

At the level of popular belief, sacred places are actual geographical locations which are worthy of reverence. The source of this reverence is variable, but always suggests a special positive relationship to the divine. Pilgrims express belief in the notion that the divine or some emanation of divine power (perhaps expressed as a miracle, an apparition, a saintly individual or such) is resident at the site of the sacred place.[1]

Within the general revered area, an especially sacred tract is honoured by the construction of edifices or some other demarcations separating the sacred precinct from the surrounding mundane environment. The place infused by the energy of divine presence is confined within

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[1] One interesting explanation that I was given for the sacredness of pilgrimage sites in West Bengal proposed that the collective worshipping performed by thousands of pilgrims over many years results in the accumulation of holiness in the site of the worship. This statement (most cogently expressed by the mahanta of the Tarakeswar maṭha) gives a quasi-materialistic explanation for a site's holiness, in that holiness is conceived as a concrete force which accumulates where devotion and worship are practised.

these boundaries. The pilgrim who enters this precinct leaves the world of society, sin, nature and illusion to enter an area which is observably different because of the deployment of the conventional attributes of sacredness. The sacred place is a specialised religious enclave as shown in its architecture, symbolism, ritual, etc.

But (and here the sacred place of pilgrimage is distinguished from other sacred places, such as the hearth, village temple, etc.) the pilgrimage site is imbued with special holiness because it is purported to have seen the historical presence of a manifestation of divine power at that place. Furthermore, in the three Bengali cases, and probably generally throughout Hinduism, the deity is believed to be an on-going resident actually living in the present in the pilgrimage place. The ordinary continuum of geographical space on earth is broken by the introduction of the divine into the human realm. At the pilgrimage place in particular has the transcendent manifested. The dust or water of the sacred place is said to possess holiness of an almost tangible variety -- it cures, restores, bestows welfare, etc. -- because it has had direct contact with the divine. Many sacred places house relics believed to belong to the sacred personage or divinity. These objects are believed to retain some of the spiritual essence (and often miraculous power) of the saint or deity who has left them. At Gayā and Bakreswar, footprints said to be of Viṣṇu and Nityānanda, respectively, are preserved. Imprints of Caitanya's body and feet are preserved at Puri. In fact, it is even claimed by some that the relics enclosed in the idol of Jagannātha at Puri are the very bones of Kṛṣṇa himself (Macdonald 1975:41). A shrine in the cremation ground of Tarapith houses two very red feet (caraṇa) said to be those of Tārā seen by Vāmākhepā. These relics attest to the purported presence of the deity at the sacred site.

Myths, such as the narratives of origin of the three Bengali pilgrimage centres (which are popular stories well-known to pilgrims), make the same point. The vitality of beliefs in the living presence of the deity at the sacred place is to be noted in the behaviour of the dharnā-jātri who could not be convinced that Ashok was my research assistant and not Bābā Tāraknātha himself, and of the young boy who expected to meet Caitanya on the local train near Navadvip.

The special status of sacred places is disseminated in popular texts, poems, legends, films, songs, etc. The effect of the widespread transmission of the belief in the actual presence of the divine at certain places is that individuals who, for whatever reason, seek to interact with supernatural powers, pursue the divine where a previous manifestation has been reported. It is a common Hindu belief that at certain times[1] and places, the divine is more accessible. Pilgrimage places, as sites where the divine has manifested, are therefore acknowledged as points on earth especially suited for approach to the deity, for here the invisible, transcendent deity has been 'proven' to be accessible.

The variation in beliefs about sacred places is enormous. The narratives of origin of Tarakeswar, Navadvip and Tarapith, the stories told about the deities, legends of cures, boons granted and miracles performed, the reputations of the saints of the sacred places are all divergent. Underlying all of this diversity, however, is a common explicit understanding of sacred places as divinely-infused ruptures in the continuous surface of the mundane, human social world.

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[1]The accessibility of divine power at certain times is discussed in John M. Stanley, "Special Time, Special Power: The Fluidity of Power in a Popular Hindu Festival," Journal of Asian Studies, 37, 1, 27-44.

At the explicit level of meaning, the necessity of the journey of pilgrimage derives from beliefs about sacred places. One must go out in search of sacred space since it is distinct from the mundane space in which one lives. Places of pilgrimage are depicted as the most potently infused sacred sites; one travels to a sacred place when the instruments of religion closer at hand do not satisfy one's needs. The journey of pilgrimage takes place when some specific feature of the sacred place recommends itself to the pilgrim as especially suited to the type of interaction with the divine he seeks.

In fact, the journey of pilgrimage has many effects on the pilgrim. It takes him from home to shrine, from everyday to sacred place, from impure to pure status and from the mundane world of man to the miraculous, ethereal realm of the divine. The sacred place is the opening where heaven issues forth onto earth, and so the pilgrim must cross all the barriers which separate the human from the divine in order to reach the place of interaction with the deity.

These generalisations about the sacred place and pilgrimage journey are very broad. A pilgrim to Tarakeswar, when asked why he was there, would answer forthrightly "To see Bābā", or "So my daughter will be blessed with a good husband" and so on. It was common in Navadvip to receive the response "To see the lotus-feet of Gaura." At Tarapith pilgrims responded with "To get Mā's blessing" or "To meditate." Pilgrimage, to the individual pilgrim, is the journey to the divine abode in search of many sorts of goals. These goals derive from general beliefs about what one can expect to receive from deities, and especially from certain deities, and so reflect the versatility of the Hindu pantheon, as conceived in popular thought. The deities of the individual pilgrimage centres are somewhat specialised in

their reputations, but within the full institution of pilgrimage, almost any motive can occasion a journey to a tīrtha. Where one goes on pilgrimage, for what purpose and what one does in the sacred place are choices strongly influenced by the individual characteristics of the pilgrim, i.e., caste, class, sex, sect and so on. Indeed, since, for example, Hindus of the very lowest castes almost never make pilgrimages, these factors are significant. But beneath the diversity, participants share an explicit understanding of certain sites as repositories of divine power and of the necessity of seeking out these sacred places by one's own effort.

The meaning of pilgrimage as it appears to participants accounts for the behaviour one observes in pilgrimage centres. The sacredness of the site accounts for the great concern with purity among pilgrims. One who approaches the deity, especially in the deity's abode, must be free of defilements. Bathing, the wearing of new or clean clothes, the ban on people of impure status, the prohibition against menstruating women, and so on, can all be related to the concerns of participants to approach the deity in as pure a condition as possible. The fact that the deity is being approached accounts for the need for interceding ritual specialists, specific ritual paraphernalia and acts, etc. Once again, the content of these elements of pilgrimage varies according to deity, cult and tradition in reflection of encompassing religious patterns.

It is not difficult to formulate the explicit meaning of pilgrimage as expressed and held by participants. They believe that the divine is more accessible at certain locations on earth, that these sites are continually infused with divine energy, and that whatever interaction one desires with a deity is more likely to reach fruition when pursued according to proper

ritual and behavioural formulae in the hallowed place where the deity lives. The mechanism generally held to account for the effectiveness of pilgrimage is merit-accumulation. Pilgrimage is believed to be meritorious by its nature. Visiting sacred places, having a darśana of the deity, bathing in holy waters, circumambulating the shrine and the like are generally held to be automatically responsible for an increase in the individual's merit store. It is also generally believed that various activities performed on a pilgrimage, such as austerities, offerings, self-sacrifice, charity, sincere devotion and personal faith, increase the meritoriousness of pilgrimage. The merit (puṇya) thus accumulated can be applied to bring about changes in the existential conditions of the life of the pilgrim in the immediate or distant futures, and so in this life or the next, and can be brought to bear on immediate personal problems or general metaphysical conditions. A common idea that journeying to the sacred place where the divine is accessible can (and indeed does) bring about a transformation in the life of the individual underlies all this variety.

c. Implicit Ideology

It has been argued that regional religious traditions, associated with various cults in West Bengal, account for most of the observable phenomena in every pilgrimage centre. Basic notions, such as Tarapith as a pīṭha, Caitanya as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa and Tāraknātha as a liṅga, are ideas which are significant in the place of pilgrimage and take their origin in the widest patterns of West Bengali Hinduism. The types of ritual, the content of pūjās, the calendrical festivals, the materials given in offering, and so on, also betray strong links to regional religious traditions. There are, of course, many features that differentiate sites

from one another, even within the same cults. The _avātaras_ of the various _līlā-bhūmis_ and the goddesses of the _pīṭhas_ have their own characteristics and attributes. However, the differentiating factors do not tend to run counter to regional religious sub-traditions. In fact, since the cults themselves are not corporate groups, nor are they governed by rigid doctrinal sources, the incorporation of locally-distinctive features into wider regional patterns is indicative of the relationship between the cult centres and the cult. The relationship is one of mutual interaction, in which the centre draws features from regional sources, but in turn makes contributions to these patterns. One good example of this relationship is seen in the case of Tarakeswar. This centre has been influenced by regional patterns of Śaivism (e.g., in the adoption of rituals practised at Vaidyanātha-dhāma), and in its own right has had an impact on those same patterns through the _maṭha_ and the proselytizing activities of the _mahantas_. One can say that cult centres adopt orthodox patterns, but also exert influence over those patterns and contribute to their development.

There is also a degree of commonality evident in all cases of West Bengali pilgrimage. Shared imagery, mythology, deities, beliefs and so on, deriving from membership in a common religious tradition based in the same language, sacred texts, history and regional identity, exist despite cultic divisions. Belief in _karma_, reincarnation, merit-accumulation and the automatic efficacy of ritual, and concern for purity, status and divine favour are examples of such commonalities. In reflecting both the diversity and unity of Bengali Hinduism, pilgrimage gives back a true image of the religious culture of the region at the historical moment.

The essential features of pilgrimage -- sacred places and the journey -- take their meaning within the patterns of Bengali Hinduism. These elements

of pilgrimage are significant not only for the reasons expressed by participants, but also because some important notions of Hindu theology, philosophy and eschatology are enacted through pilgrimage practice.

Sacred places in West Bengal, as commonly throughout India, are honoured by the construction of temples and shrines to contain (and separate off) the most sanctified of locations. It is well known that the architecture of Hindu temples embodies metaphysical concepts in its designs. Stella Kramrisch (1975) suggests that the Hindu temple is built to embody a conception of the human form -- a puruṣa. She takes the following from the Agni Purāṇa:

> the door of the temple is its mouth; the skandha, the platform terminating the trunk of the superstructure, represents the shoulders of the Puruṣa; the bhadra, or projection, the arms; and thus down the wall, the jaṅgha, or 'leg,' and to the very bottom, to the lowermost molding (pādukā), the feet.

She continues: "The names of these and other single parts of the body of man are transferred to essential parts of the structural organism of the temple in its own right" (1975:41). An illustration of this puruṣa symbolism in the temple is given in Figure 2.

The temple as puruṣa can be a starting point for an examination of the cosmological concepts involved in pilgrimage.[1] The puruṣa symbol recurs frequently in many contexts, as an expression of limited form represented by a readily available example of it -- the human body as conceived in Hindu thought.

There are many variations in the Hindu depiction of the human body. Commonly, the body is seen as a limited form within which are located

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[1]For an overview of the main elements of Hindu cosmology see R. F. Gombrich, "Ancient Indian Cosmology" in Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe (eds.), Ancient Cosmologies, George Allen and Unwin. London, 1975, pp.110-42. According to Gombrich, Purāṇic cosmology, which has permeated Hindu culture and is still the basis for contemporary popular Indian cosmology, arose after 500 B.C.

various channels and nodal points. The latter, which are considered foci of energy, are usually represented as lotuses and are called cakras (wheels). Several quotations from different sources will show the variation on this idea one encounters, and yet the common elements within the variation.

Dimock (1966:170-71) takes the following from the Sahajiyā-Vaiṣṇava text, the Ātma-tattva:

> There are four lotuses in the body. The first is the four-petalled lotus, located in the anus. This is the dwelling place of the jīvātma. There is a six-petalled lotus, located at the base of the penis, the dwelling place of the bhūtātma. There is a ten-petalled lotus, of which each petal has ten petals, located in the kuṇḍali-place, the dwelling place of paramātma. There is a burning lotus (ujjvalapadma), of which the number of petals is not specified, although it is said that each of its petals has twelve petals. This is the dwelling place of the ātmārāmeśvara, who contains bliss within himself.

Another text, the Ānanda-bhairava, sets the number of lotuses in the body at three. They are described (Dimock 1966:174-75):

> ...In the head is a thousand-petalled lotus, floating in a lotus pond (sarovara). The truth is contained in this lotus pond, and the water from it flows down and fills the lotus ponds below.... The water fills the lotus pond that is in the belly. In this pond ...floats a hundred-petalled lotus....Somewhere below the lotus pond of the belly is another pond, and in it grows a lotus of eight petals. This is sometimes called the lotus of the thigh (ūru). This pond is gloomy and dark. It is the lake of the physical aspect of the worshipper, before he has been transformed.

Śākta Tantric sources are detailed in the depiction of the lotuses of the subtle human body. They generally agree that there are six cakras depicted as lotuses located along the spinal column, with a seventh at the top of the head. The Mūlādhāra, at the base, has four petals. The Svādiṣṭhāna, in the genitals, has six petals. The Maṇipūra within the navel has ten petals. The Anāhata in the heart has eight or twelve petals. The Viśuddha within the mouth has sixteen petals. The Ājnā, between the eyebrows, has two petals. And the Sahasrāra is a thousand-petalled lotus at the top of the head (Woodroffe 1963:48-57).

Figure 2: Vāstu-puruṣa-maṇḍala -- The temple as puruṣa[1]

[1]From Andreas Volwahsen, Living Architecture: Indian, Grosset and Dunlop, New York, 1969, p.44; the depiction is from an ancient Indian manual of architecture.

The relevance of the human-body symbol to pilgrimage derives from the common Hindu conception of limited spaces being structured around significant foci of energy. Within the body are the *cakras*, and among these one is singled out as the seat of divinity within the body. The temple conceived as a body is given similar conception, so that the central sanctum within the delimited space is called the *garba-gṛha*. This term, usually translated as "womb", also means "calyx (as of a lotus)" (Monier-Williams 1964:349) and so is also the lotus seat of the deity.

Before discussing the metaphysical significance of the *puruṣa* and *cakra* symbolism, I would like to explore the existence of these symbols at other levels of Hindu cosmology. Because *puruṣa* is a generic symbol of limited form, it is applicable wherever one conceives units of form to be manifested. Hence it is common in Hindu thought to find not only the individual and the temple conceived as *puruṣa*, but also the city, region, country, continent, world and universe. The *puruṣa* is the universal microcosmic symbol of limited space, and so finds use in many contexts. The symbolism is interpenetrating, however, in that the largest level -- the universe as *puruṣa* -- which contains all Creation, is contained within the smallest level -- the *puruṣa* within the heart of the individual soul. A clear expression of this interpenetration of levels is found in the Śiva Saṃhitā (Vasu 1914:16). In a section entitled "The Microcosm", the body is explicitly associated with elements of the universe of all types:

> In this body, the mount Meru...is surrounded by seven islands; there are rivers, seas, mountains, fields; and lords of the fields too.
>
> 2. There are in it seers and sages; all the stars and planets as well. There are sacred pilgrimages, shrines; and presiding deities of the shrines.

3. The sun and moon, agents of creation and destruction, also move in it. Ether, air, fire, water and earth are also there.

4. All the beings that exist in the three worlds are also to be found in the body; surrounding the Meru they are engaged in their respective functions.

In this quotation, which expresses a very conventional Hindu cosmological scheme, "Meru" is mentioned. Meru is a mythical mountain believed to be located at the centre of the earthly realm. It is the home of the gods and so is identified by Śaivas as Mount Kailāśa, Śiva's abode, and by Vaiṣṇavas as Vaikuṇṭha, Kṛṣṇa's heaven. Meru is believed to be an actual mountain in the Himalayan range but, in symbolic cosmology, it is placed at the centre of the puruṣa and is the site where the divine resides. There are, once again, many textual variations on this theme. What is significant in all of them, for our purposes, is that the form of puruṣa is believed to contain a sacred central space conceived as a lotus and inhabited by a deity. Another name of Mount Meru is Karṇikācala, the lotus mountain.[1] Within the physical body of man, according to the cakra theory, the central (usually heart) lotus is believed to contain the holy mountain. The columnal axis of the body (the suṣumṇā) passes through this cakra, and is hence called Merudaṇḍa, the staff or rod of Meru. Since Hindu cosmography generally accepts the puruṣa form as the archetype for all levels of the cosmos, Meru can be identified at all levels as well. Hence all levels of the cosmos focus on especially sacred nodes which are

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[1]Note, for another example of this imagery: "Holy Mount Meru rises in the centre...like the calyx of the lotus flower which is the earth" (Kurmā Purāṇa I, 43, 9). Meru is a recurrent element of Hindu cosmology from the late Vedic period (viz. Taittirīya Āzaṇyaka I, 7, 1 and 3).

divine residences.[1]

Terrestrial sacred places are located within the bhūloka (earthly) level of the cosmos. The symbolic constructions of Hindu cosmology invite the assimilation of all earthly places of pilgrimage to Mount Meru, with which they share being centres of the divine within a category of limited space. It will be recalled that Navadvip and the area of Gaura-maṇḍala is conceived as a lotus at the heart of which is Caitanya's birthplace (Figure 1). Navadvip is also assimilated to Vṛndāvana, the Vaiṣṇava heaven which exists at all levels of the cosmos -- within the heart, on the earth and celestially. The place of Śiva, such as Tarakeswar, is similarly assimilated to cosmological archetypes. Every Śaiva place of pilgrimage embodies Kailāśa for, as Avalon (1963:2) says, Kailāśa is within the puruṣa:

> It is not, however, necessary to go to the Himalayan Kailāśa to find Śiva. He dwells wheresoever his worshippers...abide, and His mystic mount is to be sought in the thousand-petalled lotus (sahasrārapadma) in the body of every human jīva, hence called Śiva-sthāna, to which all, wheresoever situated, may repair when they have learned how to achieve the way thither.

Conceptions about Śākta pīṭhas also embody micro-macrocosmic notions of the same sort. Pott (1966:15) states that the central lotus cakra of the body is "the seat of the Iṣṭadevata, the special protective deity of the adept. This is usually one or other aspect of Devi...." The important

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[1]West Bengali sacred places embody both centrality and marginality in their symbolic structures. While Meru-symbolism, relating to the sacred place as centre, is schematically significant, equally important is the notion of the sacred place as margin, as in the idea of the tīrtha as the ford linking the borders of two cosmological realms. This opposition is most clearly expressed in the contrast between remote sacred sites, such as Kailāśa or Amarnath, and cosmopolitan ones, such as Benares or Kalighat. At the poles, the opposition takes the well-known Hindu form of contrasting involvement in the world to withdrawal or renunciation of the world. But, in fact, the span from remote mountain shrine to urban sacred centre is a continuum along which both notions are expressed, albeit in different proportions. At the level of symbolic structure, all sacred places are centres when assimilated to Meru and margins when seen as literal tīrthas, although one or the other of these ideas may dominate the geographical position of the shrine.

Śākta text the Mahānirvāna Tantra (V.133ff.) makes an explicit association between the deities resident in the heart of the puruṣa and those of the earthly sacred places. It addresses the following passage to the seeker:

> Next let him place in the heart Ānandakanda Sun, Moon, and Fire and on the filaments of the lotus the eight Nāyikās of the pithas. The eight Bhairavas are Asitāṅga-, Caṇḍa-, Kapāli-, Krodha-, Bhīṣaṇa-, Unmatta-, Ruru-, and Saṃhārī-Bhairava. These should be placed on the tips of the lotus.

We can recall that Unmatta is the bhairava of Tārā. Ruru is the bhairava of Kāñcī-pīṭha near Bolpur in Birbhum District, West Bengal. Kapāli is the bhairava of Vibhāsa-pīṭha near Tamluk in Midnapore District. Bhīṣaṇa is is the bhairava of Jālandhara-pīṭha near Jvalamukhi in the Punjab, and so on. Each of these manifestations of Śiva takes one form as the deity in the earthly pīṭha, and another homologous form in the seat of the divine presence within the heart-lotus of the seeker.

The discussion in the preceding paragraph is of the sort that I identified as dangerous in the introduction to this chapter. The sources that are compared are disparate and the selections taken out of context. However, these selections are merely examples of common-place Hindu cosmological concepts. They are meant to show that at the level of implicit ideology, sacred places are given meaning within wider systems of Hindu thought. One can generalise about Hindu cosmology, to some extent; those generalisations point to an assimilation of all levels of the cosmos to the common form of the puruṣa focused on the divine abode within the central lotus-mountain. This systematisation of the cosmos gives metaphysical meaning to the terrestrial sacred place. Each level of puruṣa symbolism organises its own elements, but also replicates the other levels. The terrestrial tīrtha has meaning within its own level of the universe (the earth) and within all other levels. It also plays an important role in joining

these separate levels.

Any location is fixed in space, and as such implies a concept of space and relations between spatial locations. To designate a certain site as a 'sacred place' is to invoke categories of several kinds. It is implied by this label that certain portions of the continuity of the universe are separable and distinguishable from the continuity, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Hindu cosmology is quite detailed in its treatment of the various units of the cosmos and their natures.

In general, Hindu cosmology divides the universe into a certain number of realms, or lokas. In the most typical Vedic form, there are said to be three lokas, a tripartite universe, consisting of the earth, heaven and the intermediary sphere. Earthly sacred places occupy an interesting ambiguous place in this scheme. On the one hand, sacred places are located within the bhūloka, the earthly realm.[1] On the other hand, sacred places constitute lokas in their own right. Gonda, in his erudite study of the term (1966), defines loka as "a 'place' or position of religious or psychological interest

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[1]Because the sacred place is fixed in space, its geographical dimension can be interpreted in terms of prevailing concepts of the earth, space, directions, etc. This interpretation locates the sacred place within the bhūloka, and attributes some of the significant character of the sacred place to the aspects of the bhūloka to which it is oriented. The temple at Tarakeswar, for example, faces north. When Mahanta Hṛiṣīkeśa Āśrama was asked why this was so, he replied that north was praśasta (praised, auspicious, good, commended). He gave three explanations for the status of north. This direction is the quadrant of living men, as opposed to the realm of Yama, god of death, to the south. While one does pitri karma (ancestor rites) facing south, rituals concerned with man in the world should be oriented to the north. Since Tāraknātha, as a kāmadā liṅga, aids man in his earthly needs, the liṅga faces north. Alternatively, the mahanta said, north is the direction of Mount Kailāśa, Śiva's Himalayan residence, making north sacred to Śaivas. Thirdly, he said, because the temple faces north, pilgrims circumambulating the shrine begin their clockwise round by going east. This is the direction of the sun and knowledge and so is also auspicious. The pilgrims' round thus goes from auspicious east to end at auspicious north.

which distinguishes itself from other (real or imaginary) 'localities' by a special value, function or significance of its own" (1966:15). Later he adds to this definition. Lokas, he says, are "...places, positions or states, where divine powers are believed to live and to manifest themselves and where man may be safe and happy" (ibid:72). There is no difficulty fitting all that we have discovered about West Bengali sacred places to Gonda's definition. The terrestrial sacred place, vis-à-vis the surrounding mundane environment, is a loka in its own right, possessing religious significance which is distinguished from other localities by a special value.

But sacred places have another significant role in the cosmos as connecting interphases between universal lokas. This role is the source of the sacredness of earthly sacred places, says Gonda (1966:42). The sacred place is "a place with 'virtue' where salvation may be reached, because it is a break in the homogeneity of space in which 'heaven' and 'earth' are put into communication; a place which being a manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds one's world; within the precincts of which the profane world is transcended, and in which communication with Power is possible." He does not mention the term tīrtha, but the notion of the ford is clearly invoked here, and in a later passage (ibid:59): "The sanctity of boundaries is indeed as well known as the belief that it is often dangerous to cross them. Like bridges they may be said to participate in two 'worlds' and although domains, settlements, spheres of influence are bounded and in a sense separated by them, so as to constitute 'worlds' in themselves, they allow the man who passes them to enter into another country or 'world'."

The meaning of tīrtha as a ford was explored in Chapter II, and we can see now that the symbolic conception of the 'place of crossing over'

is relevant to a discussion of the implicit ideology of pilgrimage.[1] The character of the place of pilgrimage as a ford focuses on the deity. The sacred place is itself continuous with the world of man (hence its accessibility by simple travel) except for the material image of the deity, which is of divine nature although it enters into the phenomenal human realm. The deity in the shrine centre acts as the linking bridge, a channel to the transcendent divine realm. In the Śaiva centres one finds a liṅga. As Beck (1976:221) notes, "Śiva's lingam is also commonly spoken of as connecting heaven and earth. This is especially true of the jyotirliṅga form." As was discussed in Chapter II, this form of liṅga is found in the holiest of Śaiva pilgrimage places. In the Vaiṣṇava tradition, the sacred place is the site where an avatāra has descended from heaven to earth, thus bridging the gap between these realms. The Śākta pīṭhas are also the sites of a descent -- of parts of Satī's body -- which have sanctified their earthly resting places. From these examples we can see that the implicit ideology of pilgrimage, as it concerns sacred places, gives significance to the tīrtha as the point of intersection of heaven and earth, the divine and the human.

Our discussions to this point have considered sacred places as fixed locations. However, the ford requires action to be crossed, and the passage through the connecting interphase between lokas is the second distinctive element of the implicit ideology of Hindu pilgrimage.

In the Hindu sacred literature, two types of pilgrimages are commonly depicted. Since some tīrthas are actual geographical locations, and others are concepts or symbolic locations incorporating tīrtha-symbolism, literary sources indicate that both physical and metaphysical journeys can be made

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[1]The Sanskrit root for 'passage' - tṛī - recurs in many contexts related to pilgrimage. We see it in the names Tārā, Tarapith and Tārakeśvara. It occurs in Vaitaranī, the river separating earth from Yama's netherworld, and in avatāra, the deity who has crossed into the terrestrial realm.

to tīrthas. The Skanda Purāṇa, according to Jayantavijayaji (1954:3), describes two types of tīrthas in the Kāśīkhaṇḍa: mānasa tīrthas, which are objects of symbolic pilgrimage, and bhauma tīrthas, which are objects of earthly pilgrimage. Mānasa translates literally as 'of the mind', and bhauma as 'of the earth'. Although the tīrthas of these two sorts differ ontologically, they share being the targets for sacred journeys, only by different facets of the individual. The feet seek out a bhauma tīrtha and the mind a mānasa tīrtha. We can recall from Chapter II that non-geographical tīrthas, such as a saintly person, a father, a devoted wife, exalted states of being, etc., are accorded equal status with geographical sacred places in many sacred texts. In the discussion of the Śākta pīṭhas in Chapter III it was found that some sacred goddess shrines are 'located', for example, in "strength in living beings" and "light in the solar orb" (Sircar 1973:28). We see in these examples that the there is more significance in the concept of tīrthas than the sacredness of literal geographical places alone. The journey to the bhauma tīrtha is more than a mere physical act; this action embodies an important implicit symbolic dimension which expresses significant notions of Hindu eschatology.

It has already been suggested that common Hindu cosmology postulates a homologous structure (of the puruṣa) for all levels of the cosmos. The puruṣa, whether located as the tiny man within the heart of the adept[1] or encompassing the entire universe,[2] is believed to embody all of the elements

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[1]The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, for example, speaks of "the person (purusha), not larger than a thumb, dwelling within, always dwelling in the heart of man..." (III, 11; 13: Muller (trans.) 1884:246-47).

[2]Mookherjee and Khanna (1977:71) describe the puruṣa of the universe:

> The cosmic man in his monumentality stands erect. The image contains the entire replica of the universe: the categories and substances, space, time, motion, rest, matter, its cosmological schemes and the spheres of the dense and subtle realms of the world. The whole cosmos is epitomized in the grand micro-macro vision.

The classical description of the cosmic puruṣa is given in the Ṛg Veda (X, 90), in which the puruṣa is depicted as the source of both the natural and social universes.

of the universe, at various levels of magnification. The section from the Śiva Saṃhitā cited above describes the puruṣa as containing all of the geographical features, deities, sacred places, heavenly bodies and physical elements of the universe. This idea recurs frequently in Hindu cosmography. Tīrthas always take their place in this micro-macrocosmic scheme, as is clearly expressed in the Vayu Purāṇa, for example, in which eighteen places of pilgrimage are located within the puruṣa, including Mathurā in the heart, Kāśī between the eyebrows, Gayā in the face and Ayodhyā in the nostril (Sircar 1973:128). Another example is found in the Darśanopaniṣad (Ayyangar 1952:133), in a section entitled "The Praiseworthiness of the Internal Tīrthas":

> There is Śriparvata at the Head, Kedāra in the forehead; O wise one! Benares at the junction of the brows and the nose; Kurukṣetra in the region of the breasts; the Prayāga ...in the lotus of the heart; Cidambaram in the middle of the heart; Kamalālaya in the Mūlādhāra.

Dasgupta (1976:197-98) also notes regarding the Śaivite yogic sect in Bengal called the Nāths that "in the texts ascribed to the Nāths holy places of pilgrimage located within the human organism are described." These sorts of conceptualisations of tīrthas within the body are common in other Hindu texts as well, deriving from the more general symbolic equation of the earthly realm with the puruṣa.

When terrestrial sacred places are assimilated to holy sites within the puruṣa, and are hence replicated at every level of the universe, the earthly journey to sacred places takes on a new dimension. The actual geographical journey is only one sort of passage to the tīrtha. Venturing within one's own body yields tīrthas as well. In the Śaiva-Śākta tradition this inward journey is sometimes depicted as a yogi's pilgrimage on the vehicle of the breath. The channels through which the air circulates are conceived as rivers, each with its own tīrthas. The selection from the

Śiva Saṃhitā continues by equating the holy rivers Gaṅgā, Jumnā and Sarasvatī with channels of the subtle human body. The juncture of these three rivers at the Triveṇī at Prayāga is treated in the text as both a site in the city of Allahābād and a point in the human body. In the words of Jean Varenne (1976:198-99) "the breath is conceived as making a pilgrimage from tirtha to tirtha just as worshippers do on earth. And just as those worshippers bathe themselves in the waters of the sacred fords, so the breath is bathed in the water of the inward tirthas."

It is in keeping with differences in patterns of religion between Śaiva-Śāktas and Vaiṣṇavas in Bengal that the inward journey of a Vaiṣṇava devotee is conceived as a journey of devotion (<u>bhakti</u>). A song sung by the Bāul folksingers of Bengal (quoted in Datta 1978:445-56), who are mainly Vaiṣṇava, expresses this theme:

> Gayā, Gaṅgā, Kāśī and Vārānasī
> All these places of pilgrimage are at the guru's feet.

The Sahjiyā sub-group of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas makes a symbolic association between inner emotional states fostered by the <u>bhakta</u> and pilgrimage. The author Rādhāvallabha-dāsa writes that there are three different sacred Vṛndāvanas. Two of these -- the eternal, celestial abode of Kṛṣṇa, and the earthly <u>līlā-bhūmis</u>, including Navadvip -- have been discussed previously. The third <u>dhāma</u> of Kṛṣṇa is the Vṛndāvana cultivated in the devotee's mind. He says:

> What of the Vṛndāvana of the mind? It is Kṛṣṇa-bhakti, and is manifested in the mind of the worshipper as the two who have become one in love.[1]

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[1] D. C. Sen (ed.), <u>Vaṅga sāhitya paricaya</u>, quoted in Dimock (1966:169).

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa who are forever united in love in heaven, and who took physical union in one body as Caitanya are also joined and resident in the being of the bhakta. The pilgrim who journeys to any Vṛndāvana journeys to all, since each encompasses the others and all represent the archetype.

There are many examples of this common Hindu cosmological imagery. The depiction of all levels of universal reality as possessing the same structural form causes the journey to the seat of the deity in the puruṣa to be replicated at every level. Pilgrimage to earthly sacred sites shares with every other journey to sacred centres the notion of the transposition of the individual from his ordinary residence to the sacred residence of the deity, the revered holy Meru of the puruṣa, whether in the heart of hearts, the heart, the temple, the earthly loka or the universe.

These symbolic analyses of Hindu cosmological concepts point to the significance of the journey in the implicit ideology of Hindu pilgrimage. Different sub-groups of Hinduism express this process differently, within monist, dualist and qualified dualist teleological perspectives, but all share the notion that the individual, in the course of many incarnations, is involved in a long spiritual journey in search of the godhead.[1] This journey is the cycle of saṁsāra, the wandering of the soul until it comes spiritually awake in one life. The earthly journey implicitly expresses the saṁsāric journey of the soul. From this perspective, the terrestrial

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[1]The allegorical journey to the deity is a recurrent motif in Hindu mythology and belief. Several examples will illustrate this theme. In the important Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava text the Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛta, Gopakumāra, the seeker in the story, sets off on a journey in search of Kṛṣṇa. De (1961: 237) says: "By means of his Mantra, he commences a highly allegorical journey" which takes him to Vaikuṇtha, Ayodhyā, Mathurā, Dvārakā and Vṛndāvana. Stevenson (1920:41) and Pāndey (1969:139) describe a symbolic pilgrimage which takes place as part of a ritual of a Brāhmaṇ boy's investiture with the sacred thread. The boy prepares and equips himself as for a long

pilgrimage takes its meaning and its effect by bringing the individual jīva closer to the deity, effecting a spiritual transformation in the pilgrim.

It is perhaps because they gave paramount importance to the spiritual effect of pilgrimage that some Hindu preceptors inveighed against its performance, feeling that it is too easy to give pilgrimage a hollow, literal interpretation that would ignore its implicit spiritual intent. This suggestion is lent credibility by the recurrence, once again in very different sources, of injunctions against the mere mechanical performance of pilgrimage. The Mahānirvāna Tantra has it:

> The River Gaṅgā and all the great Rivers, the house of the religious Teacher, and the places of the Devas are holy places. But for those who, neglecting the study of the Vedas, the service of mother and father, and the protection of their wife, go to places of pilgrimage, such holy places are changed to Hell.
> (Avalon 1963:221)

Ramakrishna, the Bengali saint, puts it (1971:240):

> My boy, he who has God here (in the heart), has Him there (in the holy places) also. He who has Him not here, has Him not there.

The Darśanopaniṣad verse quoted earlier ends with the warning:

> Having abandoned one's own internal Tīrthas, if one resorts to the external Tīrthas...he goes after pieces of glass abandoning the precious gems in his hands.

These selections reflect the idea that the transformational consequences of pilgrimage are the result of the progress made by the individual soul towards the deity. If the physical body of the pilgrim reaches the terrestrial shrine, but the soul of the pilgrim has not been led along

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journey. The teacher questions his intentions and warns of seven great tīrthas on the way to Benares which the boy must cross as part of his journey. Vedic ritual, to cite another very different example, also involves a notion of symbolic passage. According to Gonda (1966:95) the ritual of sacrifice in the Vedas is meant to transfer the sacrificer from this world to the 'yonder' world (svargaloka). These selections exemplify the common Hindu depiction of the life and actions of the individual as a process of journeying to the deity.

the path to God, then the earthly pilgrimage is of no value.

Taking pilgrimage as an allegory of the journey of the soul to God provides a reasonable explanation for the frequent association of pilgrimage and death in the Hindu tradition. Important places of pilgrimage such as Benares, Gayā and Hardwar are celebrated for death-related rituals and acts. If the geographical journey to the abode of the deity is taken as an allegory for the passage of the soul through life to God, then the termination of the allegorical journey at the earthly shrine invokes the idea of the completion of the soul's life passage. This suggestion explains why many sacred texts place a value on death in the pilgrimage centre (when the reality and the allegory coincide), which guarantees mokṣa (liberation) for the soul. The Liṅga Purāṇa (77.41-45), to cite one example, states:

> He who dessicates his body by means of observances and casts it off in any holy centre of Śiva whether it is of human or divine origin, whether it is built by sages or whether it is self-born, becomes a yogin and attains oneness with Śiva.

Similarly, it is also possible to understand the tradition of suicide in pilgrimage centres in terms of the coinciding allegorical and terrestrial journeys to the deity. Suicide by pilgrims is particularly well-known at Puri, where zealous pilgrims used to throw themselves under the wheels of the ponderous chariot at the Ratha-yātrā festival, and at Prayāga, where pilgrims would drown themselves at the sacred confluence. The individual, having been transported to the deity's earthly abode by means of his physical body, leaves his body behind as the soul completes its saṁsāric journey to the godhead.

Death by suicide, and hence abandonment of life on the physical plane, is a form of purification. The pilgrim leaves behind the defiled, material

form and ascends to the ethereal, spiritual loka, which is free of the defilements of matter. This idea expresses Hindu notions of the increasing purity as one proceeds up the hierarchy of cosmic realms. The heaven of Kṛṣṇa (Vaikuṇṭha) is free of all taints of māyā (illusion) and prakṛti (nature) (Sinha 1976:61). For the bhakta to qualify to enter this divine abode, he must, by his actions, free himself of these defilements. Similarly, Advaitic thought sees merger with Brahman taking place when the individual soul becomes free of all illusory attachments to the phenomenal world and comes fully awake to its identity in Brahman. In both schools of thought and in the implicit ideology of pilgrimage, the being must be purged of impurity before qualifying to achieve the journey's conclusion. The purificatory rites of pilgrimage accomplish an analogous function on the terrestrial plane, qualifying the pilgrim to enter the sacred precinct of the deity's shrine. The taints of nature and sin must be removed before entering the sacred enclave at the end of both the earthly and saṁsāric pilgrimages.

The implicit ideology of pilgrimage unites and makes comprehensible these disparate elements of the pilgrimage tradition. While the majority of pilgrimage participants would not conceptualise their actions in terms of the recurrent, deep-level pattern of the journey of the individual soul to the deity nor the place of pilgrimage as the interphase of heaven and earth, it is nevertheless the identification of this pattern which allows us to understand an important dimension of the earthly pilgrimage, especially since the journey to the sacred place is not an image that the literary codifiers of Hinduism have reserved for the terrestrial pilgrimage alone. All journeys, at their most generalised level, share with the journey to the earthly shrine being enactments of the archetypal saṁsāric journey.

The explicit meaning of pilgrimage shares with its implicit ideology the central action of the journey to the abode of the divine. These two levels of meaning interpenetrate so that, for a few literate or perhaps mystic pilgrims, the implicit ideology becomes the explicit meaning.[1] These reflective few see in their earthly journey the spiritual progress of the soul. It is impossible to sort out the historical relationship between these two levels of meaning; that is, whether the terrestrial pilgrimage is a transposition onto space of what is essentially a metaphysical conception of the spiritual journey, or whether the spiritual journey is an image drawn from the practice of earthly pilgrimage. The spiritual progress of the seeker is frequently depicted as a pilgrimage which takes the individual soul to God. Similarly, the earthly pilgrimage as the physical approach to the deity represents a significant concept of Hindu eschatology -- the journey of the soul to the One.

d. Directions in the Study of Pilgrimage

A review of the literature concerning pilgrimage reveals that existing theories generally concern one limited aspect of pilgrimage practice. The many sorts of components involved in pilgrimage make it possible to fruitfully approach the analysis of the institution from a variety of perspectives. But it is only by uncovering the meaning deployed in the logical patterning of pilgrimage practice that the schemes which give order and sense to observed behaviour are revealed. This conclusion gives rise to several suggestions of directions for the further study of pilgrimage.

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[1]This suggestion may explain the differences between material and spiritual pilgrimages postulated by Bhardwaj, without having to accept that the two are different sorts of pilgrimage, as he would have us believe. It may be rather that participants are tapping different levels of meaning according to their familiarity with the explicit and implicit meanings of the institution.

In my research, I have sought a level of analysis at which the diversity of the three case studies is underlain by commonality of structure. In fact, two levels were found to operate simultaneously in giving logical form to pilgrimage practice. The relationship between these two levels of meaning is indeed complex, and must be probed further. Notions such as Sanskritic, Great, literate, and so on, as applied to one level of systematisation of Hindu thought, tend to give too much concreteness to these parts of the Hindu socio-cultural and religious tradition. The theories utilising these concepts, by implication, separate the more abstract philosophical constructs of Hindu thought from the popular, folk or common traditions when, as I have suggested regarding pilgrimage, the different levels are closely related, expressing homologous notions through different channels, or media. The subtleties of the relationship between the different levels of Hindu thought must be subjected to further research to free us of notions of concrete binary systems and replace these with ideas of interpenetrating homologous systematisations based in a common social construction of reality.

The exercise of comparison conducted in this research is also not complete. Since my methodology has been to seek an implicit ideology for pilgrimage as observed in three instances of practice, the implicit meaning I have settled upon is that which relates to my fieldwork data only. There are other forms of Hindu pilgrimage practice which did not occur in the case studies and so did not inspire a search for interpretive schemes in other areas of Hindu thought. Two examples of other sorts of Hindu pilgrimage will illustrate this fact.

One common form of pilgrimage in India is the visit to the shrine which is especially renowned for the performance of certain rites, such

as the śrāddha of Gayā and Hardwar. The pilgrim's journey in these cases is still concerned with saṁsāric passage, only for the ancestors rather than the pilgrim. The pilgrimage journey, which the West Bengali data has caused me to see as the journey by and for the individual pilgrim may then take on a social colour, in that the pilgrim enacts social obligation in assisting another individual complete his journey.

A second example of pilgrimage practice of a sort not found in the fieldwork sample is the circular or circumambulatory pilgrimage. The three case studies are of one type in that the pilgrim journeys from home to shrine and home again. In other cases, such as the fifty mile circuit of Benares, the fixed round of Vṛndāvana, the circumambulation of the full length of a holy river or the encircling of a sacred mountain (as at Arunacala in Tamil Nadu), the pattern of behaviour of pilgrims is very different. Research may reveal that at the implicit level, this sort of pilgrimage taps non-linear, circular imagery in Hindu thought.

Research into Hindu pilgrimage practice following patterns not common in West Bengal will allow for broader comparison, and possibly the establishment of an implicit and explicit interpretation of pilgrimage practice that concerns pan-Hindu traditions in all their variants. It is also possible that no single paradigm will subsume all examples. Only further research and comparison will reveal this fact.

It will also be fruitful to apply the methodology explored in this study to non-Hindu pilgrimage traditions. Comparison of many varieties of practice within the same category of institution is an effective means of reaching generalisations. Many of the theories reviewed in the course of this work were found to be of very limited value because the generalisations upon which they were founded were framed with too little (if any) comparison. A comparison of case studies of pilgrimage within the Buddhist, Islamic and

Christian, or other, religious traditions might reveal a certain commonality of meaning at the level of participant awareness in each of these traditions, and another level of metaphysical systematisation with which participants are little familiar but which locates the particular practice of pilgrimage within wider cosmological and philosophical schemes. Findings in this direction would concern the general topic of the relationship of particular institutions to encompassing socio-cultural systems.

Appendix A: The Pilgrim Interviewing Schedule[1]

1. Location of interview
2. Date
3. Age of pilgrim
4. Sex of pilgrim
5. Language of pilgrim
6. Pilgrim's domicile: a) thana or municipality and district, state
   b) rural or urban
7. Pilgrim came to this place of pilgrimage via which places?
8. Where did the pilgrim stop for the night en route?
9. Will the pilgrim spend the night in this place of pilgrimage?
10. Profession of the principal bread-winner of the pilgrim's family?
11. Pilgrim's caste
12. Is the pilgrim: a) making a vow
    b) fulfilling a vow
13. What is the pilgrim's vow?
14. What are the pilgrim's other purposes?
15. Will the pilgrim visit other places on this pilgrimage? Which? Why?
16. Has the pilgrim visited this place before? How many times? When?
17. Has the returning pilgrim engaged the same priest as on previous visit(s)?
18. With whom is the pilgrim travelling?
19. What practices, rituals, etc., will the pilgrim perform here?
20. Pilgrim's educational level
21. Pilgrim's cult orientation
22. Other remarks, comments or observations

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[1]A printed form was used for collection of interviewing data from pilgrims. The questions are given here, without the large spaces between them on the original form.

Appendix B: Statistical Results of Interviews with Pilgrims

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jātris	Tarakeswar dharnā-jātris	Navadvip	Tarapith
1. Total number of pilgrims interviewed	513	74	506	438
2. Sex: male	292	34	250	235
female	221	40	256	203
3. Age: 10-15	8	-	-	2
16-20	38	2	4	8
21-25	67	4	29	33
26-30	86	14	60	56
31-35	71	11	75	68
36-40	52	10	43	61
41-45	52	14	64	55
46-50	47	4	51	43
51-55	35	5	60	44
56-60	24	7	42	34
61-65	21	2	38	17
66-70	6	-	17	10
70+	6	1	23	7
4. Language: Bengali	463	63	500	429
Hindi	48	7	5	9
Oriya	1	3	-	-
Malayalam	1	-	1	-
Assamese	-	1	-	-

5. Domicile

a. Domicile within West Bengal state[1]:

	Tarakeswar *tīrtha-jātris*	Tarakeswar *dharnā-jātris*	Navadvip	Tarapith
Calcutta[2]	159	22	47	151
Hooghly District				
Chinsura	6	-	8	2
Magra	3	1	-	1
Pandua	1	-	-	3
Polba	1	-	-	-
Dadpur	-	1	-	-
Dhaniakhali	2	-	-	2
Balagarh	1	1	-	-
Chandernagore	8	-	5	6
Singur	3	-	3	2
Haripal	2	1	-	-
Tarakeswar	-	-	1	4
Bhadreswar	4	-	1	1
Serampore	23	1	9	15
Uttarpara	18	1	7	3
Chanditala	1	1	1	1
Jangipara	2	1	2	-
Goghat	-	1	-	-
Arambagh	4	3	-	3

[1]The names listed under each West Bengal district are *thanas*. Only those *thanas* represented in the sample by at least one pilgrim are listed.

[2]The Calcutta urban area includes several *thanas* in 24 Parganas District. While an attempt was made to sort out pilgrims according to the *thana* of their residence, some pilgrims from the greater Calcutta area could not name their *thana*. Since the domicile of these few is the greater Calcutta urban area, they have been included in the Calcutta figure.

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tirthā-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
5. Domicile (con't)				
24 Parganas Dist.				
Bagdah	1	-	3	-
Bongaon	4	-	7	-
Gaighata	2	-	-	-
Habra	6	3	4	1
Deganga	1	-	-	-
Rajarhat	2	-	-	-
Barasat	6	-	4	1
Amdanga	-	-	2	-
Bijpur	6	-	5	11
Naihati	5	-	4	9
Jagatdal	5	3	1	1
Noapara	4	1	2	5
Barrackpore	8	1	4	9
Titagarh	1	-	-	-
Kardah	10	-	-	7
Belghoria	-	-	1	1
Baranagar	1	-	1	1
Dum Dum	2	-	1	1
Metiabruz	3	-	-	-
Mahestola	2	-	2	1
Behala	1	-	-	-
Jadavpur	-	1	2	-
Sonarpur	1	-	4	2
Bishnupur	-	-	2	-

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dhārna-jātris		
5. Domicile (con't)				
24 Parganas Dist.				
Budge Budge	12	1	-	-
Baruipur	2	-	-	1
Canning	4	-	-	-
Jaynagar	1	-	1	1
Magrahat	-	-	-	2
Diamond Harbour	1	1	-	1
Kulpi	1	-	-	-
Swarupnagar	-	1	-	1
Baduria	1	-	1	-
Basirhat	22	1	9	-
Haroa	2	-	-	-
Hasnabad	8	-	3	-
Sandeshkhali	1	-	-	-
Hingalganj	1	-	-	-
Howrah District				
Bally	4	-	-	5
Liluah	2	1	-	2
Domejur	-	1	-	4
Sankrail	-	-	-	2
Panchla	-	1	-	-
Jagatballavpur	-	-	1	1
Udaynarayanpur	1	-	-	-
Amta	1	1	-	-

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jātris	Tarakeswar dharnā-jātris	Navadvip	Tarapith
5. Domicile (con't)				
Howrah District				
Bagnan	-	-	-	1
Uluberia	2	1	1	-
Shampur	-	1	-	-
Howrah	30	2	9	16
Nadia District				
Krishnagar	-	-	21	5
Navadvip	3	-	-	3
Chapra	-	-	30	-
Krishnaganj	-	-	9	-
Nakasipara	-	-	7	-
Kaliganj	-	-	17	-
Tehatta	-	-	9	-
Karimpur	-	-	14	-
Ranaghat	3	2	21	-
Chakdah	5	-	2	2
Haringhata	3	-	1	-
Hanskhali	-	-	3	-
Santipur	1	1	4	1
Kalyani	-	1	4	1
Murshidabad District				
Shamsherganj	-	-	1	-
Raghunathganj	-	1	5	3
Sagardighi	-	-	2	-

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jātris	Tarakeswar dhārna-jātris	Navadvip	Tarapith
5. Domicile (con't)				
Murshidabad District				
Lalgola	-	-	2	-
Raninagar	-	-	1	-
Nabagram	-	-	-	1
Khargram	-	-	-	3
Kandi	-	-	3	4
Bharatpur	-	-	7	-
Beldanga	-	-	6	-
Berhampur	1	-	7	2
Hariharpara	-	-	1	-
Jiaganj	-	-	5	4
Murshidabad	2	-	-	-
Midnapore District				
Jhargram	1	-	7	1
Sankrail	-	-	1	-
Dantan	-	-	-	1
Narayangarh	1	-	-	-
Kharagpur	5	1	2	1
Midnapore	-	1	-	1
Ghatal	-	1	13	1
Daspur	-	-	1	-
Paskura	1	1	-	1
Tamluk	-	1	1	-
Mahisadal	-	-	1	-

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
5. Domicile (con't)				
Midnapore District				
Nandigram	-	1	-	-
Patashpur	2	-	-	-
Digha	-	-	2	-
Contai	1	-	1	-
Khejri	-	-	-	1
West Dinajpur Dist.				
Islampur	1	-	-	-
Balurghat	-	-	3	1
Tapan	-	-	1	-
Kaliganj	-	-	3	-
Raiganj	-	-	7	1
Malda District				
Malda	-	-	4	2
English Bazar	-	-	1	4
Habibpur	-	-	1	-
Birbhum District				
Muraroi	-	-	-	4
Nalhati	-	-	-	10
Rampurhat	-	-	-	1
Mayureswar	-	-	-	8
Muhammad Bazar	-	-	-	2
Dubrajpur	-	-	-	1

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jātris	Tarakeswar dhārna-jātris	Navadvip	Tarapith
5. Domicile (con't)				
Birbhum District				
Suri	-	-	2	5
Sainthia	4	-	2	7
Bolpur	-	-	3	3
Labhpur	-	-	5	1
Nanoor	-	-	1	-
Burdwan District				
Chittaranjan	-	-	-	1
Kulti	1	-	1	-
Asansol	-	-	6	4
Raniganj	-	-	4	-
Ondal	-	-	-	2
Durgapur	7	2	7	15
Bud Bud	-	-	1	-
Ausgram	-	-	-	1
Galsi	-	-	-	1
Raina	2	-	-	1
Memari	4	1	-	1
Burdwan	9	1	10	9
Bhatar	1	-	6	-
Mongalkote	1	-	-	-
Ketugram	-	-	5	1
Katwa	-	-	8	-
Monteswar	-	-	4	-

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jatris	Tarakeswar dharnā-jatris	Navadvip	Tarapith
5. Domicile (con't)				
Burdwan District				
Purbasthali	-	-	8	-
Kalna	3	-	9	-
Purulia District				
Santuri	1	-	-	-
Neturia	1	-	-	-
Purulia	1	-	1	-
Puncha	1	-	2	-
Bankura District				
Bankura	1	-	-	1
Indas	2	-	1	-
Sonamukhi	-	-	4	-
Kotalpur	1	-	-	1
Gangajalghati	-	-	-	2
Borjora	-	1	-	-
Jalpaiguri District				
Jalpaiguri	-	-	1	1
Dhubguri	-	-	1	-
Falakata	-	1	-	-
Cooch Behar District				
Cooch Behar	-	-	2	1

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jātris	Tarakeswar dharnā-jātris	Navadvip	Tarapith
5. Domicile (con't)				
Darjeeling Dist.				
Siliguri	2	-	2	2
Naxalbari	1	-	-	-
Kalimpong	-	-	2	-
Darjeeling	1	-	1	-
Kurseong	-	-	1	-
b. Domicile outside West Bengal state[1]:				
Bihar State				
Santal Parganas	1	-	2	7
Ranchi	1	-	-	1
Katihar	1	-	-	-
Chapra	1	-	-	-
Dhanbad	2	1	3	1
Muzzafarpur	2	-	-	-
Singhbhum	-	-	3	4
Giridhi	-	-	1	-
Monghyr	1	-	-	1
Patna	-	-	-	1
Bhagalpur	-	-	-	1
Uttar Pradesh				
Varanasi	3	-	-	1
Bareilly	1	-	-	-

[1]Listed by district unless stated otherwise.

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
5. Domicile (con't)				
Uttar Pradesh				
Lucknow	1	-	-	-
Allahabad	4	-	-	-
Mathura	1	-	2	-
Faizabad	1	-	-	-
Gujerat				
Baroda	-	-	-	1
Delhi	1	-	-	2
Madhya Pradesh				
Jabalpur	-	-	-	1
Tripura				
Udaipur	1	-	1	-
Orissa				
Jajpur	-	-	-	2
Cuttack town	2	-	-	-
Bhubaneswar	-	-	1	-
Punjab				
Bhatinda	1	-	-	-
Maharashtra				
Nagpur town	1	-	-	-

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
5. Domicile (con't)				
Assam (by thana)				
Tezpur	-	-	-	1
Barama	-	-	-	1
Tinsukia	-	-	1	-
Nalbari	-	-	1	-
Dibrugarh	-	-	1	-
Silchar	1	-	-	-
Gauhati	2	-	-	-
Bangladesh				
Khulna	1	-	-	-
Chittagong	1	-	-	-
Bakerganj	1	-	-	-
Noakhali	1	-	-	-
Mymensingh	-	-	1	-
6. Urban	319	33	121	268
Rural	194	41	385	170
7. Halts for the night				
en route: yes	71	-	41	85
no	442	-	465	353
at site: yes	103	-	296	169
no	410	-	210	269

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jātris	Tarakeswar dharnā-jātris	Navadvip	Tarapith
8. Occupation of family bread-winner[1]				
self-employed	115	20	92	115
cultivating	22	15	92	23
agricultural labour	18	2	31	9
government clerical	115	6	107	92
government technical	39	2	42	48
private clerical	61	7	37	34
private technical	59	6	27	44
medical doctor	3	-	4	3
lawyer	5	-	3	3
nurse	2	-	-	2
lecturer	2	-	3	2
teacher	17	1	30	25
police	8	1	4	6
fireman	1	-	-	-
priest	3	-	2	3
beggar	3	1	2	2
servant	1	2	-	-
traditional craft	1	-	3	1

[1] According to the 1971 Census, the following was found for West Bengal:
total workers - 17,434,400
cultivators - 7,836,690
agricultural labourers - 4,634,290
self-employed - 1,006,290
services - 1,938,900

These general characteristics can be compared to the sample data. For further details, see Census of India (1971), Paper 3 of 1972, Economic Characteristics of the Population (Selected Tables), India (Republic), Office of the Registrar Genral, B-III Part A and B-III Part B.

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
8. Occupation (con't)				
military	-	1	2	1
sādhu	-	1	4	4
unemployed	28	6	12	9
retired	10	3	8	12
student	-	-	1	-
9. Caste[1]				
A. Brāhmaṇ[2]	116	13	90	158
Kṣatriya	23	2	25	4
Kāyastha	125	10	106	110
Vaidya	16	-	5	9

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[1]Caste ranking is a difficult task, and it is certain that no ranking is uncontestable. However, consultation of a variety of sources indicates that "social precedence" (to use Risley's phrase) divides the Bengali population into high, middle and low ranking caste groups or categories. After Brāhmaṇs, Kṣatriyas, Vaidyas and Kāyasthas, in the upper echelon, we find the category of the 'clean' castes, composed of the nava-sākha castes and clean śūdras. The nava-sākha, literally 'nine branches', constitute a category of castes which high-status Brāhmaṇs will serve and which has now multiplied beyond the original nine functional castes. Higher castes will generally take water from these clean castes, hence their appelation as jala-chal ('water goes'). Below this category come the debased and 'unclean' castes, followed by those outside the system. Most of the contestation of rank takes place within each category, not relative to castes of other categories. These caste-rankings seem to be generally accepted by authors on the topic of caste in Bengal. Works consulted were Risley (1891, 1892), Basu (1962:43), Bhattacharya (1968), Risley (1969:116-21), Danda (1971:22-23), Sengupta (1973:99), Inden (1976:26) and Mandal (1977:375-84, 401).

[2]According to the 1941 Census (Vol.IV), which was the last census to include data on the caste-composition of the India population, the number of Brāhmaṇs in all Bengal was 1,349,158, or 2.2% of the total population. The percentage will have risen somewhat since that time due to the removal of much of the Muslim segment of the population of what is now West Bengal to Bangladesh. Details on the social organisation of Bengali Brāhmaṇs are available in Inden (1976).

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharmā-jātris		
9. Caste (con't)				
B. Barui	6	1	12	4
Gāndhabaṇik	15	3	5	2
Kārmakār (Kamar)	15	3	5	4
Goala	15	4	8	8
Kunwar	1	-	-	-
Kapali	4	1	-	-
Mālī (Mālākār)	3	-	1	1
Madak (Maira)	2	-	2	8
Mahisya	39	9	98	17
Napit	6	2	3	4
Sadgopa (Satchasa)	13	5	25	11
Tambuli	2	-	1	6
Tanti (Tantubāya)	5	3	-	9
Vaiśya	11	-	15	4
Aguri	1	1	8	2
Kansabaṇik	1	-	-	2
Kurmi	-	-	2	-
Kumbakar	-	-	2	-
Bania	-	1	-	1
Sānkhabaṇik (Sānkhāri)	-	-	-	1
Kumhār	-	-	-	2
Khandait	-	1	-	-
Rajbhar	-	1	-	-

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
9. Caste (con't)				
C. Jugi	2	-	2	-
Namaśūdra (Candal)	12	1	26	17
Rajak (Dhoba)	1	-	2	-
Camar (Rabidāsa)	2	-	-	-
Kaibartta	3	2	6	1
Hriṣī (Mucī)	6	-	1	-
Rajbansi	2	-	2	2
Subarṇabaṇik	16	1	4	8
Sunri	2	-	3	10
Teli (Tili)	15	3	8	14
Bāgdi	5	-	6	2
Sarnakār	-	2	3	-
Poundra	-	-	2	3
Sutradhar	-	-	1	2
Sonar	-	-	-	3
'Scheduled'	10	2	11	1
Harijan	2	-	-	-
D. Vaiṣṇava	6	-	3	4
Vairāgi	-	-	2	-
Jain	-	-	1	-
Muslim	-	-	1	1
Brāhmo Samāj	1	-	-	-
Sikh	1	-	-	-
Agarwal (Marwari)	-	-	3	1

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
9. Caste (con't)				
Bhūmij (tribal)	-	-	1	-
Unidentifiable	7	3	5	2
None	1	-	-	-
10. Vows				
a. No vow	279	-	487	360
b. Making vows[1]	56	73	11	33
for personal health	18	38	2	-
for husband's health	1	-	1	-
for child's welfare	6	-	6	4
for other's welfare	-	17	-	2
for job	9	-	1	5
for child's sanity	-	2	-	-
to regain memory	-	1	-	-
for getting child	6	3	1	1
for getting son	6	-	-	1
for business	3	6	-	4
for examination	3	-	-	7
for daughter's marriage	1	1	-	4
for rise in salary	1	-	-	-
for mental peace	1	1	-	-

[1]The purposes for vows at Tarapith total 34 because one pilgrim of the 33 had two goals to his vow.

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
10. Vows (con't)				
for court case	1	-	-	-
for good marriage	-	-	-	2
for safe delivery of child	-	-	-	1
for resolution of family problem	-	2	-	2
to find lost child	-	1	-	-
to cure child's dumbness	-	1	-	-
cannot say	-	-	-	1
c. Means of fulfilment				
pūjā	44	-	1 (to Tilakasara) 5 (to Poramā) 4 (to Gaurāṅga)	31
blood offering	1	-	-	-
Ganges water (from Seorophuli)	12	-	-	-
giving hair	7	-	-	-
milk offering	1	-	-	-
daṇḍi-katta	1	-	-	-
annaprāśana	2	-	-	1
vows of sannyāsa	10	-	-	-
goat sacrifice	-	-	1 (to Poramā)	1
d. Fulfilling vows[1]	178	-	8	45
for personal health	65	-	1	5

[1]The number of vows being fulfilled at Tarapith totals 46 because one of the 45 pilgrims had two goals to the vow he was fulfilling.

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
10. Vows (con't)				
for husband's health	7	-	1	-
for child's welfare	27	-	4	8
for other's welfare	1	-	-	11
for job	11	-	-	1
for getting child	2	-	1	3
for getting son	16	-	-	4
for getting daughter	1	-	-	-
for business	3	-	-	2
for examination	16	-	-	3
for school admission	2	-	-	-
for marriage	4	-	-	-
for getting own house	2	-	-	-
for getting lorry	1	-	-	-
for ending quarrel	1	-	-	-
for cow's welfare	1	-	-	-
for cow's pregnancy	2	-	-	-
for safe pregnancy	9	-	-	4
for hair on head	3	-	-	-
for return of lost relative	2	-	-	1
for safe installation of a well	1	-	-	-
for son's survival of train crash	1	-	-	-

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jātris	Tarakeswar dharnā-jātris	Navadvip	Tarapith
10. Vows (con't)				
for daughter's marriage	-	-	1	1
for buying car	-	-	-	1
for successful surgery	-	-	-	2
e. Means of fulfilment				
pūjā	135	-	3 (to Poramā) 4 (to Gaurānga)	31
hair offering	60	-	-	3
annaprāśana	5	-	-	6
daṇḍi-katta	4	-	-	-
milk offering	3	-	-	-
coconut offering	2	-	-	-
money offering	2	-	-	-
Ganges water (from Seorophuli)	39	-	-	-
fingernail offering	1	-	-	-
blood offering	1	-	-	-
song offering	1	-	-	-
rice offering	1	-	-	-
vows of sannyāsa	38	-	-	-
Ganges bath	-	-	1	-
goat sacrifice	-	-	-	3
bhoga offering	-	-	-	1
śāṛī offering	-	-	-	2

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
11. Other Purposes				
darśana only:				
Caitanya darśana	-	-	309	-
temple darśana	10	-	190	4
dhāma darśana	-	-	158	-
guru darśana	-	-	5	2
sādhu darśana	-	-	1	9
Rādhā-Govinda darśana	-	-	1	-
Rāsa-yātrā pratimā darśana	-	-	101	-
Nityānanda darśana	-	-	2	-
śmaśāna darśana	-	-	-	21
Mayapur darśana	-	-	3	-
Dola-yātrā darśana	-	-	48	-
Mahārāja of Manipur darśana (during his visit)	-	-	2	-
melā darśana	1	-	-	-
darśana and pūjā	168	-	38	136
pūjā to Poramā	-	-	345	-
nāma-kīrtana	-	-	6	-
to visit centre of learning	-	-	3	-
to be initiated by guru	-	-	2	-
to mark death anniversary of guru	-	-	-	2
to gain merit	-	-	-	4

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
11. Other Purposes (con't)				
for spiritual betterment	2	-	-	-
for purification from sins	-	-	-	4
for deity's blessing	23	-	-	22
to get prasāda	4	-	-	1
river bath	-	-	182	9
to collect Ganges water	-	-	3	-
hoping to obtain family welfare	48	-	56	69
for mental peace	17	-	3	34
for job promotion	1	-	2	1
for prosperity	5	-	-	-
for health	2	-	-	-
for personal welfare	9	-	-	1
tour only	4	-	6	33
death rituals (śrāddha)	-	-	29	-
annaprāśana	11	-	-	3
upanayana	-	-	-	2
go-hatya prāyaścitta (absolution of sin of killing a cow)	-	-	1	-
āntura-snāna (purification of child from birth pollution)	-	-	5	-
bath at the end of death pollution	-	-	1	-
to attend homa	-	-	-	3

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jātris	Tarakeswar dharnā-jātris	Navadvip	Tarapith
11. Other Purposes (con't)				
bath after visiting cremation ground	-	-	2	-
for rituals to alter astrological prediction	-	-	-	1
to consume ritual medicine in a holy place	-	-	1	-
to be saved from danger	1	-	-	-
to fulfil a dream	1	-	-	2
to remind deity of a vow	1	-	-	1
to perform sādhanā (japa, dhyāna, nāma-gāna, etc.)	-	-	-	22
for deity's blessing of marriage	1	-	-	-
Nārāyaṇa-sevā	-	-	-	7
priest representing a man in difficulty	-	-	-	1
to acquire Tantric powers (siddhis)	-	-	-	2
to offer hair	6	-	-	-
to show devotion	5	1	-	14
after examination	3	-	-	-
curiosity	1	-	-	-
visiting all 51 pīṭhas	-	-	-	1
accompanying another pilgrim	7	-	-	-

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
11. Other Purposes (con't)				
to get deity's permission to build a shrine	1	-	-	-
to get deity's permission to cut matted hair	1	-	-	-
12. Visits en route				
None	355	68	87	202
relatives or friends	51	4	29	39
business/official	5	-	-	5
Calcutta	5	-	8	5
Kalighat	9	-	-	-
Loknātha	3	-	-	-
Gaṅgā-sāgara	7	-	-	-
Seorophuli	62	1	-	-
Howrah	1	-	-	-
Radhanagar	1	-	-	-
Basla	1	-	-	-
Kamarpukur	5	-	3	-
Joyrambati	5	-	-	-
Daksineswar	7	-	-	-
Bishnupur	2	-	-	2
Bandel	2	-	-	-
Mayapur	-	-	398	-
Santipur	-	-	38	-
Krishnagar	-	-	6	-

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
12. Visits en route (con't)				
Murshidabad	-	-	4	3
Farrakka Dam	-	-	4	1
Tarapith	-	-	2	-
Bolpur (Santiniketan)	-	-	9	69
Nandan Ghat	-	-	1	-
Aurangabad	-	-	1	-
Kardah	-	-	1	-
Tribeni	-	-	1	-
Bakreswar	-	-	-	145
Birchandrapur	-	-	-	13
Navadvip	-	-	-	5
Nandekeswari pīṭha	-	-	-	1
Massanjore Dam	-	-	-	14
Durgapur Steel Plant	-	-	-	4
Nalhati pīṭha	-	-	-	16
Digha (beach)	-	-	-	4
Vaidyanātha-dhāma	-	-	-	3
Asansol	-	-	-	1
Labhpur pīṭha	-	-	-	1
Kamakhya, Assam	-	-	-	1
Darjeeling	-	-	-	2
Gushkura Kālī temple	-	-	-	1
Bundubasini Kālī temple	-	-	-	1
Bhadreswar Kālī temple	-	-	-	1

	Tarakeswar tīrtha-jātris	Tarakeswar dharnā-jātris	Navadvip	Tarapith
12. Visits en route (con't)				
Joydeb-Kenduli	-	-	-	3
Satī-mā Āśrama (Kalyani)	-	1	-	-
Hardwar	1	-	-	1
Gayā	1	-	-	1
Puri	2	-	-	1
Vṛndāvana	-	-	1	-
Nalanda, Bihar	-	-	-	1
Rajgir, Bihar	-	-	-	1
Nepal	-	-	-	1
13. Previous Visits				
None	109	12	360	224
Number of times:				
one	88	17	68	71
two	47	9	22	32
three	45	6	6	18
four	32	5	8	14
five	22	3	7	11
more than five	170	22	35	68
14. Interval Since Last Visit				
one week	3	2	3	1
one month	11	8	8	17
six months	45	11	8	36
one year	140	19	28	70

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharmā-jātris		
14. Interval Since Last Visit (con't)				
two years	50	6	18	30
three years	27	3	12	19
four years	21	3	7	6
more than four years	77	10	57	35
not remembered	30	-	5	-
15. Engaging the Same Purohit				
yes	167	21	-	67
no	237	41	-	147
16. Travelling Groups				
alone	62	48	29	26
with family (number in party:)				
two	54	17	137	36
three	104	4	118	46
four	71	2	66	61
five	43	-	38	34
six	31	-	7	22
seven	14	-	15	15
eight	8	-	3	13
nine	9	-	4	7
ten	4	-	2	3
more than ten	3	-	2	8
with friends (number in party:)				
two	32	1	3	16

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
16. Travelling Groups (con't)				
three	9	-	9	7
four	1	-	6	11
five	4	-	5	7
more than five	32	-	13	20
organised groups[1]	32	2	49	106
17. Ritual Performances				
pūjā:				
Tāraknātha	412	-	-	-
Tārā	-	-	-	356
Gaurāṅga	-	-	108	-
Vāmākhepā samādhi	-	-	-	1
Poramā	-	-	345	-
Govinda Bāṛī	-	-	17	-
Soṇār Gaurāṅga	-	-	15	-
other Navadvip shrine	-	-	21	-

[1]Organised tour groups included: at Tarakeswar--Friends Union of Burdwan and the Berhampur, Murshidabad Utsava Committee; at Navadvip--Indian Iron and Steel Co. (Durgapur), the Bhagavat Baddri (Kankinara, 24 Parganas), Gaudīya Devanātha Matha (Jamshedpur, Bihar), Burnpur Staff Association, G. Ī. S. Cotton Mills Recreation Club (Serampore), Kali Kala Girls High School (Calcutta), Mohini Mills (Calcutta), Chara Bagan Youth Society (Badra, Howrah), Puncha (Purulia) Public School, Hazaribagh Coal Mine (Bihar), Rishra Cotton Mills (Hooghly) and Kashipur (Calcutta) Hospital Staff; at Tarapith--Shibpur Girls' High School, Manganeśwari Kālī-bāṛī Āśrama, Chhatranal Radhanagar Bireshwar High School, Eastern Railways Staff Association, Naihati Businessmen's Association, Kotowali (Jalpaiguri) Public Health Centre Staff Association, Jagatdal (24 Parganas) High School, Gurda High School, Midnapore Ekatrik Sangha, Talpukur (Barrackpore) Girls' High School, Morisai II (Birbhum) Family and Child Welfare Office Staff, Hindusthan Motors Staff, Pradeep Apera Theatre Troupe, Bengal Foils Staff Assoc-

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
17. Ritual Performances (con't)				
hair offering	73	-	-	4
nail offering	1	-	-	-
blood offering	2	-	-	-
milk offering	4	-	-	-
taking amulet	1	-	-	-
pouring water (tarpaṇa)	16	-	-	-
recitation of texts	2	-	-	3
recitation of mantras (japa)	5	-	-	44
money offering	2	-	-	2
precious metal offering	1 (silver bel leaf)	-	-	-
annaprāśana	18	-	1	9
daṇḍi-katta	8	-	-	1
vegetarian fast	1	-	-	-
vrata (vows)	75 (Gajan)	-	-	-
dhyāna (meditation)	-	-	-	7
bhoga offering	-	-	-	1
śyāmā-saṅgīta (song) offering	-	-	-	2
upanayana	-	-	-	2
homa	-	-	-	3
tear offering	-	-	-	1

iation, Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Topavan (Calcutta), Vāmā-deva Sangha Āśrama (Calcutta).

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
17. Ritual Performances (con't)				
goat offering	-	-	-	3
darśana only	10	-	247	50
taking prasāda	55	-	-	12
offering wine	-	-	-	1
sāṛī offering	-	-	-	2
collecting śmaśāna mud	-	-	-	1
collecting yūpa mud	-	-	-	1
Ganges bath	-	-	182	-
śrāddha	-	-	29	-
kīrtana	-	-	6	-
āntura-snāna	-	-	5	-
dharnā	-	74	-	-
go-hatya prāyaścitta	-	-	1	-
dīkṣā	-	-	2	-
none	1	-	6	8
18. Education[1]				
nil	91	20	179	76

[1]The Census of India, Volume XVI for West Bengal and Sikkim (Part 1-C), Subsidiary Tables (1961:382-88), gives the following educational statistics for West Bengal (in percentages):

Female	urban	illiterate	50
		literate without educational level	29
		primary or junior basic	17
		matriculation and above	4
	rural	illiterate	88
		literate without educational level	8
		primary or junior basic	3.5
		matriculation and above	0.5

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
18. Education (con't)				
to Class III	26	10	14	15
to Class VII	85	21	60	64
to Class X	102	9	65	72
School Final (Matriculation or Higher Secondary Diploma)	76	6	50	89
Post School Final (including technical diplomas)	59	4	32	31
Bachelor's degree	59	4	73	66
post-graduate	13	-	32	25
traditional education	2	-	1	-

Male	urban	illiterate	34
		literate without educational level	32
		primary or junior basic	21
		matriculation and above	13
	rural	illiterate	61
		literate without educational level	24
		primary or junior basic	13
		matriculation and above	2

Since a large proportion of the pilgrim sample comes from Calcutta, the statistics on educational levels in that city are also noteworthy:

Female	illiterate	41
	literate without educational level	30
	primary or junior basic	22
	matriculation and above	7
Male	illiterate	32
	literate withour educational level	30
	primary or junior basic	20
	matriculation and above	18

	Tarakeswar		Navadvip	Tarapith
	tīrtha-jātris	dharnā-jātris		
19. Cult Orientation				
Śaiva	79	25	36	22
Śākta	92	14	50	208
Vaiṣṇava	64	15	296	76
Tantric	-	-	1	3
Other (Nātha, Bāul, mission, personal *guru* (e.g., Sai Bābā) etc.)	10	1	2	9
None	268	19	121	120

Appendix C: The Rateboard of the Tarakeswar Temple

The following fees are posted in the temple at Tarakeswar for the information of pilgrims wishing to make offerings or request particular ritual performances. All fees are payable to the gaddi (the temple office). In 1978 one rupee was worth approximately 6p.

1. Mangala ārati	Rs. 31.00
2. Bhoga for the whole day	501.00
3. Bhoga for the afternoon Bhoga Pūjā	351.00
4. Moni bhoga (sweetened rice and milk)	75.00
5. Phala (fruit) bhoga	51.00
6. Śītala bhoga (with gañja, tobacco, etc.)	51.00
7. Muṇḍana (haircut)	1.50
8. Annaprāśana (first food ceremony)	1.00
9. Upanayana (initiation)	3.00
10. Offerings of gold, silver, incense or blood cut from the chest	2.00
11. Homa-yagga (fire-offering)	2.00
12. Satyanārāyaṇa kathā (a recitation)	2.00
13. Cow offering	15.25
14. Cow offering in śrāddha (death rituals)	25.00
15. Male goat sacrifice	1.25
16. Pigeon sacrifice	1.00
17. Drum beating	2.00
18. Installation of a plaque in the temple up to one square foot	75.00
19. Installation of a plaque in the temple of one to three square feet	101.00

20. Dharma-praṇāmi (a share of the bhoga prasāda)	Rs.	3.00
21. Phula-karaṇī (a ritual for predicting the future)		3.00
22. Śoṛasopācara (offering of sixteen items)		31.00
23. Rudra abhiṣeka (a recitation)		11.00
24. Lagu Rudra abhiṣeka (repetition of the recitation)		51.00
25. To paint the temple		1001.00
26. To repair the temple		301.00
27. To meet the daily expenses of the temple		701.00
28. Śastayana (offering of flowers and bel leaves in the name of ancestors)		
for one day		5.00
for one week		15.00
for one month		35.00

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